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MORAG THE SEAL

MORAG
THE SEAL

BY

J. W. BRODIE-INNES

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TO

THE REAL MORAG

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HER GRACIOUS

INSPIRATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

THIS STORY IS DEDICATED

MORAG THE SEAL

CHAPTER I

A FIRST-CLASS railway-carriage on the North-Western line seems hardly an appropriate place for the study of legal problems as to the rights of property, still less for the starting-point of a weird romance, interwoven with some of the most uncanny and gruesome experiences that have probably chanced to any ordinary Englishman in our modern and usually prosaic age and country. Yet so, in fact, it chanced to me as I sped northwards on a certain day in early July, bound for an unknown country, to visit an unknown man, with the details of the object of my visit spread out on the seat before me in various bundles tied up with red tape, and sundry parchments propped open and large sheets of manuscript written in a clerkly copy-book hand, and thickly scored with blue and red pencil marks. The errand was to outward seeming prosaic enough. I was by profession a conveyancing barrister, whose hobby was pedigree cases and international complications of property law, and

with sufficient private means to indulge my fancy and wait till recognition came in the line I preferred, rather than take any chance that turned up.

A good case had presented itself, and I had worked at it *con amore*. A certain Sir John Bradley had acquired a property formerly belonging to a family of the name of Cameron, and his eldest son and heir, the present Sir John, was anxious to have a formal and exhaustive opinion upon his title. This appeared simple enough. Considerable sums of money had been advanced on the security of the property, neither principal nor interest had been paid, and the lands had eventually by ordinary processes of law passed to the lender. A few slight hitches, such as always occur when English solicitors have to deal with questions of Scotch property, and fail to comprehend the language or ideas of their colleagues across the Border, were all there was to be noticed in this part of the case. What was really perplexing was the evident anxiety of both the elder Sir John and his son to make out, so far as I could judge on the very slenderest foundations, that they were of kin to the original proprietors, if not indeed, as was sometimes hinted, the true owners by right of birth. This certainly puzzled me not a little. Their right to the lands was perfectly unchallengeable, and what could be the purpose of raking up a complicated title which, if it existed at all, could only be made out by an ingenious dovetailing of English and Scotch law, and which, even if correct, was long ago barred by prescription, seemed the height of folly.

However, it was to this very folly that I owed my connexion with the case, so I was not disposed to be over-critical.

It was a raw, unpleasant day outside, a chill rain and driving mist swept up from the western sea, and blotted out the face of the landscape. It was comfortable enough in the carriage which a friendly guard had locked up for me, but I looked forward with some apprehension to the long drive which I knew to be in store for me at the end of my journey.

Once more I settled myself down to grasp the whole facts of the case before I should meet my host and client. The evidence of his assertions was, he said, there ; he could not understand my opinions, and he was convinced I could not understand his points. Altogether, a talk would be more satisfactory—in fact, several talks. In short, he could not or would not come to London, and he wanted me to go down and study his case on the spot. He was prepared to pay handsomely. I had nothing of great importance to keep me in London, and wanted a holiday. A week in the West Highlands looked tempting. My solicitors urged me to go as the only means of ever arriving at any sort of settlement of the difficulties, and so here I found myself now nearing the station of Ard na Righ, which was my destination.

Hastily I bundled my papers together and thrust them into my bag, and jumped out on to the long wet platform—the sole passenger alighting there—saw my modest trunk and portmanteau and my bicycle put out, the train glided away, and in this

simple and prosaic way I passed from the ordinary world of men and women and commonplace events into an atmosphere wholly unfamiliar, a strange dream becoming at times a gruesome nightmare. A small spring cart with a rough Highland pony and a rougher-looking Highland driver was waiting to convey me through the glens and corries to Airton House, and I shivered as I drew my mackintosh closer round me and prepared to face the elements, thinking to myself that my host might as well have sent a closed carriage for me on such a beast of a day, and feeling generally out of tune and out of temper with all my surroundings.

Soon, however, I found that Donald was a most excellent companion, good-humoured and loquacious. He knew every mountain and glen and stream, and had interesting stories to tell about them all. Moreover—and this was a special grace to his English-bred listener—his speech was not the Lowland Scots which I confess I should have followed with difficulty, but the perfect English, as it is spoken in the West Highlands, with the slow musical intonation that falls almost like a caress. We drove at a merry pace along the single long street of the village facing the still oily-looking waters of Loch Righ, and by the ruined kirk where Donald told me it was said that the ghosts of all those who had died at the herring-fishing walked in procession on Hallowe'en, carrying with them, shoulder high, the latest arrivals among them, the men and boys whom the sea had taken in the last year.

An old sexton was busily delving in the kirk-yard, and as we drove past a lonely shieling a little further on I heard the measured taps of a hammer beating on hollow wood. I know not why, but the commonplace sound was eerie and creepy to me. I did not like to hear it. It was a coffin he was making, that invisible carpenter. Why I should have thought so I can't say, but I felt convinced that so it was.

We had come to a steep ascent, and Donald and I were both walking to ease the sturdy little Highland beast. The taps still sounded with a regular, monotonous beat, though the cottage was now some distance behind.

'That's a lonely place for a carpenter's shop,' I said, more for the sake of saying something than for any other reason. Those monotonous taps were getting on my nerves, and I wanted to hear the sound of a human voice.

'It's empty,' said Donald. 'No man has lived there for these twenty years now, since Niell Cameron died. He was the last wright we had in these parts. They have to get their coffins from fifteen miles away now.'

Were the tappings in my brain, then? Strange as it must seem, I could not at that moment ask Donald about them. I merely said: 'There seems to be a funeral on hand now. I suppose some one has lately died?'

'Oh aye!' he replied. 'I think they will be burying Morag the Seal.'

'Oh! But I mean in the churchyard. I thought

I saw a grave being dug. They wouldn't bury a seal there.'

'Aye! that's just it; but not exactly a seal, you understand, as you might see a seal on the shore. Morag looked like a woman—and the most beautiful woman ever was seen about here—and all our boys were in love with her; but woe to the one she favours. It's body and soul he will lose, for she will never rest till she draws the soul out of him by her deviltry, and he follows her till they find him down on the sea-shore, and they hear Morag laughing away in the wash of the waves. Oh, it's many's the time they have buried Morag, but I doubt the stone that will keep her down has not been hewn yet.'

'Then you mean that this strange seal woman you speak of is dead?'

'Aye! so they think. I was hearing last night that old Sandy Macpherson—he is uncle to the poor lad that was drowned for Morag—went down to the shore on the night of the full moon—that would be four days ago—and he crammed a silver button off his kilt into his gun and shot at a seal swimming near in to shore, and there came a long pitiful cry like a woman in deadly pain, and in the morning there lay a corpse on the sands, just out of the wash of the waves, a beautiful woman, quite naked, with her long, dark chestnut hair streaming over her white body, and her great brown eyes wide open, and looking with that long gaze that tugs a man's heart, just as if she was alive.'

'Who saw this body?' I queried, for I was getting

greatly interested in Donald's story. These old legends always had a peculiar fascination for me, and here I was, so to say, in the very heart of one.

'Oh, just Sandy and his son. They carried her up, and the wright came that night with the stretching-board and laid her out.'

'Who was the wright then?'

'Oh, just Niell Cameron.'

'But, Donald, you told me Niell Cameron was dead. How was that?'

'Oh aye! Well, maybe Niell was; but he might be laying out Morag for all that.'

Donald's story was getting too mixed for me, and we had got to the top of the hill, so I made a mental note that, among other things during my stay at Airton House, I would find out all there was to be known about seal women, and especially about this wonderful Morag.

We rattled merrily down a steep road, through a dark, awful-looking glen, that seemed to hold many tragic histories and many weird and gruesome possibilities; and Donald's talk, so far as he could spare attention from his pony to talk at all, was tuned to the scene. It ran mainly on murders and massacres of clans, on the haunting wraiths that flitted by moonlight across the heather, and the spots where the deer fled wildly if they came inadvertently upon them, and which dogs would not pass. All through the glen his speech was of horrors. At last we emerged into the open country again. The sea lay before us, and to our

left the clouds were breaking, gleams of light shone waterily on distant islets, and a faint sparkle was on the tiny waves that danced on the pebbles.

The whole of that drive from the little roadside station to the old house of Airton has remained on my memory with photographic exactness of every detail. It was the first introduction of a Londoner accustomed to an almost level country and the quiet charm of English rural scenery to the wildest hills and glens of the West Highlands, and therewith the first introduction of a man whose training had made him somewhat matter-of-fact and materialistic to the dreamy imaginative atmosphere of the Celtic people. Yet I suspect there must have been a hidden and unsuspected vein of that same imaginative quality lurking somewhere within me, for I felt an immediate attraction, a sort of strange understanding of and sympathy with Donald's weird stories to which I could hardly in London have fancied myself listening with patience. In short, I was a new creature, beginning a new and very strange life, and I would fain give my readers a mental picture, as vivid as it was and ever will be to me, of the scene wherein the events were crowded which were to change my whole life.

It was just as we emerged from the dark glen that I saw how the hill on our right hand formed a sort of promontory, behind which an arm of the sea extended almost at right angles into another range of hills and moors, the great deer-forest of the estate, so Donald told me. Immediately opposite to us and across the water was a broad valley filled with

dense woods, but all the rest of the country was bare and rugged.

The road turning round between the hill and the water now brought us in full view of Airton House standing on a little eminence and towering over the thick woods round it. It seemed from this first glimpse to be largely in ruins, but at the distance of nearly two miles it was not easy to tell.

'Is that the old Cameron Castle?' I asked Donald.

'Aye, is it,' he replied. 'That's the old house, but not where they lived; no, the last Cameron lived at the Dower House, yonder among the woods. I've never been there; you see it's on Mr. William's land; he's Sir John's brother you know; they are not speaking now you understand, and Sir John is not pleased if any of his people go on to Mr. William's land.'

This was the first I had heard of Sir John's brother, beyond the mere fact of his name occurring in the pedigree.

'How can two brothers live side by side and not speak, Donald?' I said; 'it seems unnatural.'

'Sorrow o' me knows, sir!' he replied; 'they've both got tempers, and I believe they quarrelled over the property, but indeed it's no business of mine, and I should not be talking.'

The trap rattled over a little bridge, where a brawling burn ran down to the sea. On the right hand was a deep gully through which the stream rushed between precipitous banks, clothed on either side with dense thickets, and here and there on its course were tall trees that met in feathery arches over the

water. It was a very beautiful spot, but seemingly absolutely inaccessible. No man or boy, scarcely even a monkey, I thought, could have climbed up those steep banks, or forded the rapid stream. Yet over the bridge were leaning and lounging a few wild-looking men and women of an unmistakably gipsy type who stretched out begging hands as we passed.

Donald gave an exclamation of disgust.

'The laird should not allow those trash there,' he said; 'they are just a curse to the country—they steal and beg and poach, and we get the credit of it as often as not.'

'But where do they live, Donald?' I asked—for there seemed no trace even of a gipsy camp anywhere within reach.

'Oh! just up the burn,' was the unexpected reply. 'Dear knows how they get there, but they do. I'm thinking nothing else in life, unless mayhap a wild-cat, could get up there; but those tinker trash do it, and they disappear up there, and no man can follow them.'

So we rattled on till we reached a tumble-down lodge and ruinous entrance gates; sorely squalid and neglected, I thought, for the home of a man of the acknowledged wealth of my eccentric client.

A short drive brought us to the house; a very singular-looking edifice in sooth it was. The right wing seemed to be just an ordinary farmhouse—a door in the middle, two small windows with little square panes on each side, and a row of small windows of similar type above, a greyish roof of

heavy slates with three attic windows, the walls harled, and a sickly Ayrshire rose rather perfunctorily nailed over one window—this was all. The centre was a new mansion of red sandstone and rather pretentious, the windows had plate-glass and heavy stone mullions, the first story coming near to the eaves of the right wing ; a large porch jutted out from the centre. This part was considerably loftier than the right wing. Beyond this, again, on the left was apparently a very old castle half in ruins, the upper portions showing great rents in the masonry and eyeless window-holes, but there was glass in many of the ground-floor and first-floor windows, little diamond panes with leaded medallions, and occasionally shields with armorial bearings. Evidently this part of the house was of great age, and it was heavily mantled with ivy. At the extreme left hand was a large tower half projecting from the front as if it were no part of the original design, and to the right of this a low arched doorway, the third door in the front.

I had no time for further observations, for my host was standing at the porch in the centre of the house ready to welcome me. A tall thin man with a keen face, perfectly white hair, an aquiline nose, a light grey homespun coat and knickerbockers, an expression on his face of perfect courtesy and kindliness—a man, I said to myself, that I should take to. This was my first impression, succeeded by a slight transitory feeling of distrust, for which I instantly reproved myself.

A footman took my modest belongings from the

cart, while Sir John apologized with perfect manners for not sending the brougham to meet me. The horse had gone lame, or cast a shoe, or something—I forget what, nor does it matter. The apology was graceful and gracious, and my momentary feeling of soreness vanished.

'Come in! Come in!' he said; 'welcome indeed to this queer old house. It was so good of you to come and help me. I am really most deeply indebted to you. I fear it must have been a great inconvenience to you.'

'Not at all!' I said, rather anxious to stop the profusion of his thanks, which seemed rather overdone, as I had simply come on business and for a substantial fee. 'It seems, indeed, a quaint and delightful old house you have.'

'An epitome of its history,' he replied, as he led the way into a large, comfortable hall panelled in red pine. 'The old castle was the home of my forbears, many centuries ago. Then it passed to another branch of the family, and they fell on evil days, and could not keep up their old state; in fact, they became little more than farmers, and lived in a house which is really just a farmhouse on the other side; there are some connecting buildings that join it with the old castle behind this part where we are now. Then the old place came back to the old family, as you know, and my father built this centre where we are standing now. You shall see it all to-morrow; it is rather late now, and you must be tired—so good of you to come.'

My memories of the papers had given me rather a

different impression, and even now as I stood in the comfortable and well-designed hall, with its parquet floor, pitch pine, and deerskin rugs, I could not help thinking of the old Camerons who lived there, holding great state in the old feudal castle, or dwelling proud and noble in their poverty, in the little farmhouse, beside the crumbling monuments of their former greatness, and doubtless dreaming of the day when some lucky turn of the wheel should give it all back to them. And now, by contrast, the Bradleys, and their bran-new centre to the old house, their pitch-pine hall, and all the rest of it seemed nothing but hideously vulgar.

It was a passing phase—Sir John was speaking again.

'I dare say you are wondering why we should take all the trouble that your study of our papers must have indicated to you to get back the old place, even to spend more than it was worth to get back our own, for that was what it really came to. Well, Mr. Kingsburgh, you know we Highlanders are a sentimental race, and we love the land of our forbears. I suppose you Southerners—pardon me! I use the phrase in no disparaging way, believe me—but you can hardly understand our feelings. And so it chanced when my father found that there was a chance of getting back the old place from the branch that we hold had no right there, he would have sacrificed all his fortune, if necessary, and I would do the same. Now I have kept you standing here all this time, listening to an old man's maunderings; let me show you your room. Up this stair,

you see, to the first landing, then through this swing door, and right through to the back; now a little to the left, the end of this passage, and there you are in the connecting buildings I told you of behind my father's addition; this room abuts on the old castle, but it's all right; there are no ghosts, so far as I know, and if there are, they are the ghosts of my own people, and have far too much courtesy to annoy my guest, especially one who has done so much for me as you have.'

It was a comfortable room into which he ushered me, an old-fashioned paper on the wall, well-padded easy-chairs covered with old chintz, and a bed inviting repose, with curtains of similar material.

'Come down when you are ready, or not until you like,' said my host; 'we dine at seven. The doctor will be here to dinner, no one else; I trust you to make yourself quite at home.'

He left me, and I sank into an arm-chair to think the position out. Somehow my distrust of the old man revived. Why had he so strongly insisted on his Highland blood? I had had all the pedigree before me, and, so far as I could remember, the Bradleys were as distinctly a sound English, middle-class, commercial stock as ever I had come across; there were a few female ancestors here and there with Scottish names, but nothing to show whence they came. A baronetcy given in return for some commercial aid given in time of need to the Government of the day—that was all.

There seemed no solution of this problem without further evidence, so I relegated it to the list of other

questions connected with the case, to wait for more light, and proceeded to examine my room carefully. Evidently it occupied a projecting angle; in the wall to the right on entering was a window looking up the glen towards the deer forest, and commanding a lovely view of hills and corries rising one behind another in the most subtle gradations of blues and greys, touched here and there with rose, as the rainy afternoon had cleared to a beautiful Highland sunset. This window looked right along the back of the house—a strange irregular line of buildings. The wall opposite the door had also a window looking apparently into a small courtyard; immediately opposite was a blank whitewashed wall about seven or eight yards distant. I opened the window and peered out. A small yard paved with flagstones lay below—not much used, I guessed, for the flags were dark and mossed with age, and looked slimy with damp. To the right it was open, and I could see the same view up the glen as from the other window; to the left there was a wall, I conjectured, of the old ruined castle and a low arched opening, but whether it were a door or only an archway I could not make out.

Having so far satisfied my curiosity, I turned to the room itself. This seemed ordinary enough, just a comfortable old-fashioned room, substantial mahogany furniture, a few prints and water-colours on the wall of fair but not striking merit. I glanced at one after another with a somewhat languid interest, more to pass the time than anything else, till over the mantelpiece on the left hand wall on

entering I saw a dainty pastel drawing, probably a century old, at least, but exquisitely preserved, and evidently most lovingly cared for in the past, though now the frame was tarnished, the gilding worn away in many places, and the glass dusty and stained; yet the picture was as fresh as ever. It was the face of a lovely woman with great masses of dark chestnut hair coiled loosely over the sweet pale brow; dark brown eyes, with that long yearning gaze in them that a man never forgets when once it has tugged at his heart—eyes slightly raised as if in prayer or deep meditation; a gentle oval face with the rosy lips lightly parted. That was all, but beneath was written in an old-fashioned, sloping Italian hand the single word 'Morag,' and a date just a century ago.

CHAPTER II

By this time I found I had not very much more than time to dress by seven o'clock. In fact, it was just ten minutes to seven when I joined my host in the great drawing-room that occupied most of the first floor of the modern centre of the house. Sir John came forward with his usual old-fashioned, if somewhat overdone, courtesy. My mind was full of the pastel, and I asked him at once what he could tell me about it.

'Ah, yes!' he said. 'I know—a beautiful face, isn't it? But I'm sorry I can tell you nothing more whatsoever about it. One of the old Camerons, or rather, I should say, one of the younger branch who held the property for a time, but I don't really know which; I have tried to find out, too, for that pastel has interested me as much as you. I suppose she must have been a sort of cousin of mine; you know, we Highlanders count kinship a long way, and that girl, whoever she was, must have been a credit to the old stock in looks, at any rate. A handsome race we always were, Mr. Kingsburgh. Don't think me conceited; I am an old man now, and looks matter very little to me, but I'm proud of the old

stock, and I don't mind confessing it. By the way, I want to ask you, among other things, if I can't change my name, or rather resume the old name of my family, now the old place has come back to us.'

I had no time to reply then, for there came a ring at the front-door bell.

'Ah, there's Dr. MacCulloch, punctual to the moment, as usual; an old-fashioned virtue, out of vogue now, they tell me, but a great virtue in my eyes.'

The doctor came in as he spoke—a little thin, loosely hung man, with a keen lean face and smooth black hair, and a pair of the kindliest brown eyes I ever saw in any human head, a man you would go to instinctively in any trouble, sure of help and sympathy to the very fullest measure of his capacity. A shrewd face, too, betokening, if physiognomy were to be trusted, a man of rare qualities in his profession, and a man to whom one might entrust one's life with confidence that all that skill could do would be done.

Sir John made us acquainted. 'Dr. MacCulloch is our greatest authority on everything about this district,' he said. 'He has all the local history at his fingers' ends. He has been of the utmost service to me in getting up the history of this old place and of my family. I trust, Mr. Kingsburgh, you will find his deep knowledge of use to you also in the tangled investigations that you have undertaken.'

The dinner-gong cut him short. I had discovered by this time that my host was an inveterate talker

So much the better, I thought; I shall be able to manage him easily. A silent man is always the most troublesome. Only we three sat down to an excellent though very plain dinner. The doctor was a perfect fount of stories of the place, and, indeed, of the whole country-side. Ancient history of the coming of Columba and his monks, comparatively modern stories of the romantic wanderings of Prince Charles and the devotion of the Highland lasses, stories of raids and wild fights and smuggling and cattle-lifting, with quaint touches about the manners and customs of many bygone ages. He told us of the old Camerons, of the sieges the mouldering old castle had been through, of the gradual fall into poverty consequent on their wild and reckless hospitality mainly, of how they came to live at last, poor but proud, in the humble farm-building, cultivating a couple of hundred acres or so for sheer maintenance, while all their broad lands were in the hands of creditors, and held by trustees; how at last, a large proportion of the debts being paid off, they had gone to live in the Dower House, with a small but sufficient income; how investments failed and they were again in trouble.

'Very sad, very pathetic,' said Sir John. 'I can hardly bear to think of it now, though I was very bitter against them once for having the lands I thought should be ours; that was when I was quite a boy, before my father acquired the lands. I am so glad now that he did what he did, and gave a fair, even a large, price for them, which I trust has made the last Camerons comfortable and compara-

tively prosperous. Doctor, do you know even yet Mr. Kingsburgh can't quite understand my title. Can't you put the gist of it in a nut-shell? We shall want your help often, I expect, for I know I am intolerably verbose, and I think my solicitors must be more so. They seem to have raised so many points that the real issue has got lost among them.'

'The main point is simple enough,' said the doctor. 'The property, like many of our Highland estates, is entailed on females as well as males. Well, there were two brothers, and the eldest had only a daughter, the other had sons. Of course, the property should have gone to the daughter, but it never had gone to a girl, and somehow the deed of entail wasn't forthcoming, and it was quietly assumed that it was a tail male, and the nephew succeeded without opposition, and his descendants were the old Cameron family. The daughter married, and she, again, had a daughter, and their descendants are the Bradleys.'

'Yes! yes!' I said, a trifle nettled, though I would not admit it, at my peculiar province being thus invaded by an outsider who presumed to tell me how a title was made up—'Yes! I know all that. But where's the deed of entail or any proof of its terms? and where are all the records of that time? Where are the registers of the births of these people—the daughter and the nephews—and their marriages, and all the rest of it? The whole thing has vanished into thin air, and there are all sorts of strange legends of Scotch marriages and holograph wills,

and such like, but not an ounce of evidence of any part of the story.'

'As to the deed,' he said, 'curiously enough, the original has, as you say, mysteriously disappeared. Of course, it should have been recorded, but the lawyers tell me it wasn't, and I suppose they know. But I have a copy. It turned up only a day or two ago when a local solicitor was clearing out a lot of old rubbish from his office. I'll bring it round for you to see. As to the registers, they were in that old ruined kirk that you passed on your way here.'

I was getting rather bored by this talk, wherein it seemed to me that the doctor was discoursing much on what he knew very little about, and I seized the chance of changing the conversation.

'Oh! that old kirk,' I said. 'Isn't that where they bury Morag the Seal? Doctor, I wish you'd tell me that story. I want to know all about these queer West Highland legends.'

I saw the doctor's face change, and he seemed to flash a warning note to me, which, however, I failed to catch or interpret; but the effect on Sir John was little short of startling. His face grew pale for a moment, then almost purple, and his eyes gleamed with anger or some other strong emotion.

'Confound it all!' he said. 'Are we never to get free from that degrading superstition? Oh! what a fraud all your Christianity, and your intellect, and all the rest of the sickening humbug is in the face of such rot as this! It's worse than the African savages—at least, they don't pretend to be Christians. Hang it, sir! the naked cannibal is a scholar

and a gentleman beside your vaunted West Highlander.'

'Oh, it's all right, Sir John,' said the doctor calmly, looking steadily at our host as he spoke—'all right; there's hardly a breath of superstition left in the country now. Your liberality to the schools and the Free Kirk has brought a flood of light over the district.'

He was speaking slowly, deliberately, with a measured intonation, keeping his eyes fixed on the old gentleman's face. The purple hue gradually faded, but the eyes still gleamed wrathfully.

'Then why the devil does a comparative stranger, a man who knows nothing about the country, like Mr. Kingsburgh, bring up this loathsome, degrading story? We crush it down in one quarter, and it rises in another.'

'It's just because Mr. Kingsburgh is a stranger. I expect he has come across that wretched little book on Highland superstitions. There are a few copies still left in the country bookstalls.'

He looked at me with a meaning glance, which I immediately interpreted, and nodded, saying, 'Yes; I picked it up in a little book somewhere.'

'There you are,' said the doctor. 'Of course, Mr. Kingsburgh could not know how education and culture have progressed, especially since you, Sir John, have been here, and your late honoured father.'

I thought the doctor's tone was somewhat unctuous and unnatural. A moment later I realized that he was exercising some hypnotic influence over

Sir John, which seemed to calm him without much effort. He lay back in his chair, drawing his breath in long gasps, as though breathing with greater difficulty, but otherwise quiet, with no trace of the recent violent explosion.

'Let me get you a drop of whisky, Sir John,' he said. 'You have been rather overtired to-day.'

So saying, he went to the sideboard to pour out the whisky. I watched him in a long mirror, and saw him slip a small silver case out of his pocket and adroitly pour a few drops from a tiny phial and fill a hypodermic syringe.

'Here you are,' he said, coming back quickly with the tumbler of spirit. Sir John's hand lay on the arm of his chair. The doctor took it, as if to feel the pulse, and dexterously inserted the needle. The patient seemed to take no notice, not even to be conscious of what he was doing. Withdrawing the needle, he laid his hand lightly on the old man's forehead with a stroking, upward motion. 'You are still a shade feverish,' he said. 'Go and lie down for a bit. Here, let me ring for James.' He touched the bell as he spoke. 'I'll take care of Mr. Kingsburgh. You can join us in an hour or so in the smoking-room if you feel up to it; if not—well, sleep, and you'll be as fit as a fiddle in the morning.'

Sir John's man appeared, and, leaning on his arm, the old man rose, saying with some evident effort: 'I have to crave your pardon, Mr. Kingsburgh. The doctor is right—I was overtired. I fear I am growing old—I leave you in good hands—

—I hope to rejoin you later—you will excuse me, I know—a little sleep, and I shall be myself again.'

He left the room, leaning rather heavily on the man's arm, and leaving me considerably astonished at the sudden outburst of causeless anger, the equally sudden collapse, the doctor's control over him, and, in fact, the whole bizarre scene.

'I'm afraid I made a somewhat unfortunate remark,' I said.

'You couldn't know—anyone might have said just the same—only it happens to be just a hobby of Sir John's—a hobby without much sense in it, as I think.'

'But do tell me, doctor. What on earth is the meaning of it all? I'm a simple London barrister, and all this sort of thing is new and strange to me. I have only been about six hours in this country, and it seems to me I have heard little else but Morag the Seal. Who and what is it?'

'Well,' he replied, 'in the present case you must allow it was yourself that introduced the topic. Neither Sir John nor I would wantonly have broached it. But have a cigar. I must play the host for a bit, till he comes back, if he does so. I'll have one, too, to keep you company, though it isn't often that I indulge. Well, where were we? Oh yes, Morag the Seal. Well, I fear I can't tell you much. You know, of course, that the Highlanders have strange ideas about seals. They regard them as semi-human. Sometimes a seal will take human shape and come up among the villagers; sometimes it's a man, sometimes it's a woman, but

in any case woe betide those who are intimate with it, for they fall hopelessly in love with the thing, and it's not human, and it's as cruel as a beast and beautiful as a god. And sometimes, again, a man or a girl will go away to the sea and will become a seal, and you can see it swimming about near in to shore on moonlight nights, with a painful wail that cuts one's heart to hear.'

'I see. But what about Morag?'

'Oh! well, that's a local story. The old folk say that there was a seal-woman long ago among the old Camerons, and she is a sort of guardian spirit, or something, to the race. She comes to avenge any wrong done to them, and warns them of death or danger. She comes singing round the house when an heir is to be born to the family—a crooning old cradle-song of Skye she sings, and they call it "Morag's Song"; and she wails a coronach before the death of any of the old race. I'm just telling you what the people about here believe as firmly as they do in the Free Kirk.'

'But you yourself, doctor—what do you think about it? and what on earth makes Sir John so wild at the mere mention of a harmless bit of local folk-lore?'

'I think I can answer the last question in a way,' replied the doctor. 'Sir John a great deal more than half believes the old legend—maybe he has reason to; I can't say—but so it is, and consequently he dreads Morag—indeed, all the ordinary man's instinctive fear of a ghost is multiplied a hundredfold in him, and his instinct is to protect

himself or crush down his fears by violent denials. It chances, too, unluckily, that he has very irritable nerves and rather a weak heart, hence such an outbreak and collapse as you have seen, for which I do not hold him any more responsible than I would for a sudden attack of lumbago; it is wholly physical. Fortunately, I have a certain hypnotic control over him, and a tiny hypodermic injection hardly ever fails to put him right in an hour or two.'

'Morphia?' I queried.

'No; a special Indian drug little known. I found it when I was a ship's doctor in my youth. The faculty won't recognize it, but I've used it with great benefit. You will see, too, the reason now why Sir John is so anxious to make out his claim to be true representative of the old Cameron race, though he would never admit this to you or to any other person—probably not even to me, who am more in his confidence than any other human being.'

'No, doctor, I'm hanged if I do see that part of it.'

'Why—don't you see?—Morag is a sort of tutelary spirit of the old Camerons. If Sir John is an interloper, she will persecute him, even, as he thinks, will ultimately kill him; but if he is the true representative and rightfully in possession of the property, she would guard and protect him.'

'But, surely, assuming that the story is true—really, Dr. MacCulloch, your Highland air must have infected me; I am talking as if these weird fairy-tales were actual—but surely, assuming this,

Morag would know—a tutelary spirit can't require lawyers' evidence to know who is to be protected.'

'So any sane man would think, but, you see, on this point our poor friend isn't sane. We must allow there's a kink in his brain.'

'But tell me now your own opinion, doctor,' I said. 'Do you seriously think there's anything in it all?'

'You have asked me a hard question,' he answered, 'and one I would shirk answering if I could. Of course as a doctor I am necessarily somewhat of a materialist, and of course I must allow fully for delusions, and fancies, and hysteria, and all the other causes that drive men into seeing what is not there; but in sober truth, after making all these deductions and allowances on the most liberal scale, there is a residuum that is absolutely not to be so accounted for. There are without doubt strange things seen and heard that appear to have no assignable material cause. Persons of undoubted veracity and the most unimaginative of mortals have seen a strange woman wandering about the hills and woods and by the seashore on moonlit nights where certainly no living woman was or could be. I would put this also aside as delusion or imagination, but that coincident therewith things have been predicted to myself which have come absolutely true to date, and things happening in a distant part have been seen and described. Only three days ago my man came to me and told me I was wanted at a lonely farm ten miles away across the hills. I knew no messenger had, or could

have, come, so I just asked, "What for?" The man said, "There's a child very bad—an accident. Take your surgical case; they think the child is dead now, but you'll save it." "Who told you?" I asked. "Morag," was the reply. Well, I had had experience of the sort of thing before, and I didn't feel justified in refusing to go. I took my surgical case as he said, and was just in time; a poor little boy had been badly hurt in a threshing-mill. I thought he was dead when I got there, but I pulled him through, and he'll do well now.'

'This Morag seems a beneficent fairy then,' I said.

'On this occasion it seems so, but her appearances often presage disaster.'

'Who sees her, and how does she appear?' I queried, greatly interested in the weird story.

'That again I can hardly tell you with any accuracy—the instances are so various as hardly to come within any rule. Sometimes it will be an old shepherd or boatman; sometimes a young lad or a girl. Sometimes they see only a strange woman walking slowly along the cliffs, or by the sea-shore, or in the depths of the woods. Sometimes she comes and talks to them—gives them a message, perhaps; as she did to my man the other day; sometimes, again, she will become intimate—will behave, in fact, like a living woman of flesh and blood, only no one knows where she lives, or who she belongs to, or whence she comes. This is the time when they fall in love with her, as that poor boy did who was drowned the other day.'

'Was there really any truth in that story?' I asked.

'Hard to say. I knew the boy and all his people; a strange, dreamy lad, not quite "all there," as our people say. Fond of wandering by himself in the woods and by the shore. He used to rave about a beautiful woman who came and walked beside him, and told him things; but none of his family ever met her, nor would he tell anyone anything about her. Certainly, once or twice, I myself saw him some distance off walking with a tall graceful woman, who clearly did not belong hereabouts. I only saw the back of her. She was dressed in some dark brown sort of material, pretty close-fitting. I described it to my wife, and she said, "That's a Princess robe you are talking of; no one wears that now, and no one ever saw one here." I don't know much about that sort of thing, but that's what she told me. Well, later on the boy got morbid and miserable—said his lady had left him, and laughed at him. And then he was found drowned.'

'His uncle shot the seal, didn't he?'

'So they told me, and I was called to go down to the beach to see a dead body washed ashore, but when I got there (I was a little late in going) the body had been taken away.'

'Did no one see it, then?'

'No one, so far as I know. The Fiscal heard of it and came down yesterday, and, if you'll believe me, the very men who had sent for me—old Sandy Macpherson and his son—swore they had never

seen or heard of such a thing. Sandy had shot a seal and it had drifted out again to sea, that's all they would admit. By Jove! how time goes! It's past ten. Sir John will not be coming down again to-night. With your permission, Mr. Kingsburgh, I'll just run up and see that he is comfortable for the night. I suspect he has fallen fast asleep—I hope so—and he'll be quite fit again to-morrow; and as soon as I've seen him I'll get away home to bed.'

So saying the cheery doctor bustled out of the room, and I betook myself upstairs, feeling, sooth to say, as if I had suddenly waked up in a new world. London and my friends there, my profession, all the old familiar landmarks, seemed to be almost on another planet. My very beliefs were changing: I was living in a fairy-tale, and seriously asking myself about the reality of apparitions of seal-women and kindred strange and uncanny legends.

For half an hour or so I turned over a magazine in a dreamy fashion to try and compose my thoughts; then I got into bed, still trying to adjust my mind to my surroundings.

The window I have mentioned that looked up the glen was on the wall to the right hand; the other window, that looked on the little square court, was at the foot of the bed. The night had turned hot and sultry after the rain. I pulled up the blind and flung the window wide open to let in some air, then back to bed, and in a short time I was dozing.

It must have been about twelve o'clock that I suddenly started broad awake, and heard sounds as of muffled feet outside the window at the foot of the bed. I thought it was some domestic movement of servants, and wondered dreamily at their being so late astir. Lazily I opened my eyes and looked out of the window. The whitewashed wall opposite gleamed strangely white, and at first I fancied the moonlight must be full upon it. Then I wondered vaguely why the moon should shine there, where naturally the shadow of the house would fall; and as the sleep cleared from my eyes and I saw plainly, it was evident that some strong light was on the wall, though from whence it came I could not conjecture. All my faculties were now fully alive, and I became certain that something unusual was going on. I sat up in bed and looked intently at the wall opposite, when what was my surprise to see a silhouetted figure of a man with a crisp beard and a Highland bonnet pass across, clear and distinct as the shadow on a magic-lantern, then two men side by side, one clear and sharply defined, the other blurred as though out of focus. They carried something between them, as it seemed, shoulder high; slowly they passed along, followed by two more, the long dark shadow of something between them. All at once a light seemed to flash on my mind: it was a coffin they carried, these weird shadowy men, but where to? or from whence? and whence came that strange light? I listened intently for the sound of footsteps, but there were none, only from far up the glen came a long wailing

cry—perhaps a gull, or some night bird, perhaps; but it was useless to try to conjecture—then through the stillness the faint sounds of tapping as I had heard them on the drive from the station, the tapping of a hammer on a coffin. The light on the wall was beginning to fail—I know not by what queer trick of illumination it chanced, but for a moment it seemed to gleam full on the pastel—and at the same time I thought I heard voices, and among them, soft and low as they whispered, I fancied I detected Sir John's tones.

I sprang out of bed and ran to the window and looked out. Not a sign of anything moving, the little flagged court was still and silent as the grave. Had I dreamed? I could hardly think so.

Mystified and ill at ease I went back to bed, and it was perhaps small wonder that my sleep was troubled that night.

CHAPTER III

AFTER a rather restless night of troubled dreams and queer forebodings, I fell into a sound sleep towards morning, from which I was wakened by a footman bringing me a cup of tea and my bath, with the information that breakfast would be ready in an hour. I sprang out of bed, and after a vigorous souse in cold water, felt refreshed and myself again, all the uncanny visions of the night already relegated to limbo. I dressed rapidly and strolled downstairs, finding that I had over half an hour still before breakfast. The hall-door stood wide open; it was a lovely summer morning, and the delicious West Highland air, keen with the sting of the salt sea and fragrant with the wafts of heather honey, came in like a benediction.

I took my hat from the point of a magnificent pair of antlers that served for a hat-rack, and walked out into the sweet morning air. The ground in front of the house sloped away rapidly in the direction of the road by which we had driven the previous night. On my right was the arm of the sea, across it the deep valley with its thick woods which I had noticed. In front and over the nearer

trees I could catch glimpses of the white road. I saw the little burn that ran foaming into the loch, and the bridge where I had seen the gipsies; beyond this the head of the promontory, and farther again the open sea, dotted with tiny blue islands, and here and there one of larger size lying like a curled blue-grey leaf near the horizon.

For some moments I feasted my eyes on the lovely prospect, then I turned round to the right, and walked along the front past the old farmhouse, as Sir John had called it last night. A broad gravel path led round close under the walls, dividing the house from the well-kept lawn and flower-beds, and shrubs that, without any apparent division, seemed to melt away into grass fields, and these again into moors and heather.

The back of the house was just what I should have expected, game larders, coal cellars, a keeper's room with guns, weighing machines, and the like.

Beyond these a projecting angle jutted out, with a window on the first floor, which was obviously that of my room, the window below had been long bricked up, but the trace of it was still clearly visible in the harling. Beyond this corner again the old castle rose stately in its green mantle of ivy, and from its side jutted out the wall that formed the outer side of the little court on which my window looked. Remembering the strange shadows I had seen on the night before, I now studied this wall with some curiosity. At the back of it, away from the house, was an old flight

of stone steps that rose to the height of the wall and then turned on to a landing, whence a few more steps led to a little door boarded up, and seemingly leading to a circular stair in the corner turret of the castle ; outside of this was a small field, and then a waste of heather and peat.

Not much to be learned from this, so I went into the little court. The low archway at the end led simply to a vaulted room in the castle, maybe a dungeon, or perhaps a more prosaic cellar, anyhow it was now a store of gardener's odds and ends, barrows, ladders, trestles, and such-like ; it was closed by an iron grating that looked as if it might have been an old portcullis, now turned into a gate and fastened with a very modern padlock. The third side of the court, underneath my room, had a window boarded up and seemingly not disturbed for ages. The ends of the boards were rotten and only just hanging to the nails ; any attempt to remove the boarding would have brought the whole thing down.

I examined all this with somewhat minute care, to try and find some material explanation for the light and shadows that I had seen the previous night, but seemed almost driven to the conclusion that I must have been dreaming.

After all, this was not unlikely : the new surroundings and unfamiliar atmosphere, Donald's weird stories about the burial of Morag the Seal, the sturdy common sense of the doctor that seemed reluctantly compelled to admit that there was something in it—of such material are dreams made.

And yet there were footmarks on the damp stained flagstones—several marks of naked feet, and one or two evidently of nailed boots, one I noticed particularly with the nails arranged to form the letter M; but after all, I reflected, there was nothing in this, the gardener's shed was at the end of this little court, it would have been strange if there had not been traces of nailed shoes, and many, both men and women, seemingly went usually with bare feet, I had seen them along the roads.

Involuntarily I caught myself saying half aloud: 'Burying Morag the Seal.'

The sound of the breakfast-gong broke my reverie, and I hurried round to the front door, to find Sir John standing on the step and inhaling the sunny freshness of the morning, with not a trace of last night's indisposition about him.

'I have to apologize to you, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said, 'for disappearing so suddenly last night. Unfortunately, I am subject to occasional slight heart attacks. Thanks to our good Dr. MacCulloch, they are seldom more than an affair of a few hours; but I have to go and lie down at once. However, it's all right again now. But come in and have some breakfast, and then, with your permission, we will look at some of the papers and documents you are so good as to be willing to help me with. I hope the doctor may be able to look in; you know, he has found that draft entail. But, dear me! I'm keeping you standing here all this time! Come in! come in! there's breakfast ready.'

We went in and discussed a capital and very sub-

stantial breakfast, after which we adjourned to the smoking-room. Sir John offered me every kind of smoke, himself only taking rather a small cigarette from his own silver case. I loaded a pipe, and sat down to consider whatever he should lay before me.

'First of all,' he said, 'you should know something of the property you have to deal with. Here is a map of the whole of the old Cameron estates. Here, you see, is the road you came by; here's the castle, and if you follow the same line further on you come here to the deer-forest. I hope you may be my guest long enough to have some sport there. That hill at the end of the loch here under my finger is Ben na Chat—that is, the Hill of the Cat; it is full of wild-cats. Then, if you follow round the loch—you see, it is not very far by the edge of the deer-forest—you come where I have marked it with a blue line; that is my brother William's land.'

I noticed that he spoke with some repugnance, as if he were touching on a painful subject.

'I did not understand anything about the divison of the land,' I said. 'How was it possible under the entail?'

'It was not possible,' he replied, 'and never should have been done; but, you see, my father broke the entail, and we—that is, my brother and myself—(that was before I knew his real character) consented. And then my father made the most extraordinary will, leaving all this land with the red line round it to me, and this with the blue line to my brother. You will see how ingeniously it is

arranged, with really a diabolical cunning, to spoil my property without benefiting him. Here, for instance, you see how this wooded bit—a glen it is—just opposite here, cuts right across the forest and spoils the best stalks, beside ruining my sanctuary. Now, William has no deer; his land is all under sheep and grouse. There was no reason on earth for such a disposition. That bit of ground is worth thousands to me, and is worth nothing to him.'

'Surely,' I said, 'that is easily remedied. From what you say, it would be simple to give him something of far more value to him; and I gather it would be well worth your while to do so. A simple deed of excambion, and the thing is done.'

'Yes,' he said, 'simple enough to your legal eyes, and easy enough for any sane man. But you don't know William; he is not sane. What you suggest has been proposed to him over and over again by various people on my behalf, but he won't listen. Nothing will satisfy him but just his own pound of flesh. You see, he's married; and though he has no children, he is always hoping, silly ass! and because I am a bachelor, he thinks I shall always remain so. Tell me, Mr. Kingsburgh, what do you think would be the legal effect if I were to marry one of the Camerons?'

This was an astounding proposition to me. I had heard practically nothing of the present Camerons, and had merely formed the idea that Sir John regarded them with marked aversion so far as he thought of them at all. However, a moment's reflection recalled to my mind the doctor's account of

his state of mind; and I saw in his suggestion his great desire to fortify his position by the aid, however acquired, of the old family; and so to mollify or escape the vengeance of Morag the Seal on an interloper, for such, in spite of all evidence to the contrary, he still clearly thought himself.

'It is a new idea to me,' I said. 'I must take a little time to think it out. But, Sir John, do you know these Camerons? I never heard anything of the family. Who are there of them?'

'Really, I know very little myself,' he said. 'My father acquired the property when I was quite a boy. At that time there was an old Mr. Cameron, about my father's age, and a son who, I suppose, would be about my own contemporary. I never saw him, but I heard that he married afterwards a Macdonald of Skye, I think, and died some fifteen years ago, leaving three daughters. It is all hearsay, but I believe that is about correct.'

At this moment the doctor walked in with a bundle of papers in his hand.

'Good morning, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said. 'Well, Sir John, no need to ask if you are quite all right again—your colour tells me. Here you are; I've brought you the draft deed of entail I told you of last night, and a few letters which seem to identify it sufficiently. I am in hopes that the clearing out of the old rubbish of that office may yield something more. It's an awful nuisance, those records having all gone amissing. They must have been in that old kirk, you know; but there's no trace of what became of them, nor even of where the last

minister lived. However, these letters may be worth something. They are curious, any way. Now I must be off; I'm ten minutes late on my rounds as it is.'

'Stop just a minute, doctor,' said Sir John. 'Tell me, do you know anything of the present Camerons?'

'Yes, of course I do. Didn't I bring them into the world, bless 'em? Eh! no harm in blessing 'em. You've got back your own property, Sir John, and they were right bonny lasses.'

'Oh yes, doctor,' he replied, 'that's all right; but I want to know what family there are.'

'Oh, I see. Well, there's a widow lady, young Mrs. Cameron—dear me! dear me! *old* Mrs. Cameron, I suppose people would say now—and there's two or three daughters. Years since I've seen 'em, though. Held two of them at the font, and can't for the life of me remember their names. No matter, I'll find it all out if you really want to know. I remember the eldest; fifteen or sixteen when I saw her last; such a lovely girl, but delicate—oh, very delicate. Now I must be off. Good-bye, good-bye!'

I followed him to the door.

'Doctor!' I said, 'I didn't like to mention it before Sir John—I don't want to tread on his corns—but is there any chance of any of those records having been taken to the Dower House, where the old Camerons lived. It happened once, in another case I was in, that the very papers we had hunted high and low for turned up in an attic cupboard in the old family house that had been sold twice over in the meantime.'

'Well, I don't know,' he said. 'The Dower House, you see, is off my beat now—the Alt na Crois doctor takes that side of the loch—and none of Sir John's people ever go there, because of the silly feud between the brothers. They may have been taken there, and I suppose they would have been saved. Yes! about the first thing that would have been. There may be something in what you say. I expect, wherever they are, whoever has them would give me leave to rummage. You see, I'm a sort of licensed antiquary, and folk are really most generous to me with their Charter chests and muniment rooms. I'll see, I'll see.'

So saying, he bustled off and jumped into his trap, and I heard the long steady trot of his horse as I rejoined my host.

I will not weary the reader with an account of all the documents we examined, and our discussion.

The draft settlement left by the doctor exactly bore out his account of it, given the night before, and the letters established several minor points. Tucked under the string of the bundle was a note addressed to myself, and marked 'Strictly private.' I took an opportunity, while my host's attention was fixed on a plan, to open and read it. It was thus:

'Dear Mr. Kingsburgh,

'I think you may get a lot of information if you can get hold of old Allan Kerr. They call him "the little loonie," but he isn't so much of a loonie as he looks. He was a clerk in the office I told you

of, where I got the draft entail. I believe he's got many of the papers in his possession now. Anyhow, he knows a lot about the old family. But don't mention this to the laird, for he can't abide the name of Kerr, perhaps because the old man has a very firm faith in Morag the Seal ; declares she comes and tells him things, etc. Keep this to yourself.

'Yours very sincerely,

'DOUGAL MACCULLOCH.

'P.S.—I haven't seen old Kerr myself for some time, but you will easily find him, I think.'

I slipped the note into my pocket, and said nothing about it, and we went on looking at maps and papers till the gong sounded for lunch, which we had *tête-à-tête*.

When we rose from table, Sir John said :

'I must leave you to your own devices this afternoon, Mr. Kingsburgh. I have to drive out beyond Alt na Crois, and unfortunately, as I must take the pair of horses, I can't even offer you a drive. There are rabbits, if you care to shoot them ; or they tell me there's good fishing in a loch at the back of Ben na Chat.'

I hastened to assure him that I was not a very keen sportsman. I would take my bicycle and explore the country, which would be a greater delight to me than killing things.

'All right,' he said ; 'do just exactly as you please. I am greatly in your debt, anyhow, for your goodness in coming here ; only don't go off the road on the forest. I notice that Southerners, as a rule,

haven't an idea of the harm they may do on a forest by wandering about over the heather.'

I promised I would stick strictly to roads and paths; indeed, as I explained, my bicycle would not permit me to do otherwise; and I certainly should not leave it by the roadside for the sake of trespassing.

So we parted for the afternoon, Sir John stepping into his carriage, and five minutes later I swung on to my bicycle, and thus, though I knew it not at the time, I took the second and irrevocable step into the new world of dream or romance that, all unconsciously, I had entered about twenty-four hours ago. I spun swiftly down the avenue to the rather sordid and ill-kept lodge, but, being on an exploring expedition, and in search of novelty, I did not retrace the road we had driven by yesterday, but, turning sharp round to the right, and skirting the policies, I found myself again on the margin of the loch, and heading away for Ben na Chat.

It was a warm afternoon of the sweetest West Highland type. Soft delicate scented airs breathed languorously over long tracts of heather clothing the hills, the blue distances quivered in the moist misty heat. I was fain to ride slowly from the warmth of the afternoon, apart from the very beauty of the scene, which would have made me linger by its own novelty of charm.

The road, I found, went right round the head of the loch, and skirted the water on the other side. I was delighted with the view of the castle from over the water. Its old ivy-mantled towers rose

grandly above the surrounding woods, and as I have explained, the modern vulgarity of the centre, facing the other way, was quite invisible from here, as also was the farmhouse wing; one saw only the old feudal stronghold of the Camerons of Ard na Righ, looking proudly over their ancient lands, as in scorn of the modern mercantile capitalists who had entered into and possessed the estate that once was theirs. To the right was the little brawling burn, and the bridge where I had seen the gipsies, and I could see from here how it had cut itself a narrow channel through the hill, which rose to a great height on either side, so as to appear a mere cleft, clothed with trees and bushes stretching up towards the summit of a lofty and very steep hill. Such a cleft, with a brawling torrent rushing over rocks at the bottom of it, might well be described as inaccessible; but into the clear blue air above it there curled a thin blue wreath of smoke.

I saw the road by which I had come lying at the base of the grand hills that formed the deer-forest bending round where Ben na Chat lay bathed in the full sunshine, the limestone and quartz on his rugged crown glittering like ivory and gold.

The air was utterly still, the sun was intensely hot, and swarms of midges rose from the water's edge. About half a mile ahead appeared the edge of a wood on the right hand, offering a welcome shelter. I resolved to push on to this, and if there were no road through it, at all events to turn in and sit down for a while, and get cool under the trees.

When I came up to the beginning of the wood, I saw that it lay in a wide and deep valley, clothed on both sides with magnificent old trees, and prolific undergrowth. A winding road led into the heart of this sylvan paradise, whose cool green shadows invited the weary traveller to enter and rest.

I rode slowly up the lovely woodland lane, where fresh beauties opened before me every moment. Now it was a great red rock that jutted out from the deep shadows of the trees and caught a gleam of sun on its side; again, a tiny beck dashed down the hillside among rocks and boulders thick with the vividest green moss and carpeted with ferns. A roe-deer looked at me with its great trustful brown eyes from behind the stem of an immemorial beech-tree, and multitudes of wild-flowers sprang from the mossy carpet on either side of the road; while flecks of sunshine played over the ground, making strange patterns on the long grass and the moss and the gravel; and on either side thronging stems were half hidden and half revealed by the downward-sweeping boughs.

I could hardly believe that I was in the West Highlands. The whole scene and surroundings were so utterly inconsistent with what I had left only an hour or so ago, it might well have been a valley in Northern Italy or on the Rhine. A shady spot beneath a huge tree where was a large flat stone, completely covered with a deep cushioning of soft moss, invited to rest and the enjoyment of one of the loveliest bits of woodland scenery I remember ever to have beheld.

I sat down and propped my bicycle against the tree, and lay down after lighting a pipe to drive off any midges there might be about. Then suddenly the thought sprang into my head: Of course this must be the wood I had seen from the further side, wherein Donald had said was the Dower House, and wherein no one seemed to have been, which lay on the mysterious Mr. William's land. Well, at all events, the old Camerons had a most lovely home even in the days of their decadence, when they lived at the Dower House. Where was the Dower House? I wondered. It must lie somewhere this way, for Donald had told me it was among these woods, and seemingly there was no way in except the road by which I had come. On the other hand, these woods were of enormous extent—that could be seen from the other side—and it was not unlikely that there might be several good houses in such a perfectly charming situation. To try and find it without a map or guide of some sort would be like hunting for the traditional needle, and, besides, to run a grave risk of losing myself. I had had some previous experience of wandering in unknown woods without a map. I regretted that I had not taken more special note of Sir John's big map of the property, and resolved to repair the omission on the first opportunity.

Meanwhile, my mind insensibly fell to picturing the old family in their quiet secluded life in this delightful spot, before the Bradleys had ousted them from their immemorial possessions, and I asked myself: 'Why those enormous loans?' The

Cameron who was Sir John's contemporary, living here quiet and retired from the world, could have had no occasion for such large sums. I had not thought of this before, but now there seemed to be some mystery about it which would be another point to be solved before the matter was finally straightened out; for, curiously enough, as I sat thinking and dreaming here, I got to looking on myself much more as the counsel and adviser of the old family than of my own client. Somehow, they seemed so very real to me, and Sir John and Airton House seemed to be fading away into long-past memories.

The life and stir of the woods was all round me; birds twittered strangely tame in the branches, a rabbit hopped close by my foot. Was that a gleam of a woman's dress among the trees? No, only a shadow swaying over an old trunk that had a fantastic resemblance to the figure of a lady in old-world dress. All the same, I should hardly have been surprised to see nymph or dryad or whatever might be the West Highland equivalents of these woodland denizens peeping at me from behind the leafy screens. The influence of the place and the still heat of the afternoon were making me somnolent. I got up and shook myself, and decided I would just take a short stroll in the wood, finish my pipe, and come back to my bicycle and ride back in time to get some tea and dress for dinner.

Just behind the tree under which I had been resting a most engaging little path led winding into the deeper depths of the woods. I would follow

this for a short distance and see where it led, and then for home.

Often I have noticed it is on just such impulsive resolves that the most vital issues of life hang, far more than on our gravely and carefully considered determinations.

Slowly, and with intense enjoyment, I wandered along the tiny path seldom enough trodden, as it seemed. Many bare twigs of last winter's shedding lay across the track which any passing foot would have broken, and here and there a bough had fallen right in the way, which a passer-by must have removed in order to get by. These things but added to the charm of this exploring walk.

Presently the path grew wider, and its sides more trim and cared for; laurels and other shrubs bordered it, especially the wild myrtle, which grew in profusion. A rustic bridge led over a little stream. The short sharp call and whirr of a pheasant startled me close on my right hand, and I found immediately before me a hedge of laurel and sweetbriar, with a little wicket-gate. Was this a house thus buried in the woods, and, if so, where could be the approach to it? Over the hedge the trees were cleared, some great conifers stood stately throwing their shadows on a sunny lawn, and beyond just a glimpse of red-brick gables and a tiled roof, roses climbing up the walls with a profusion of flowers.

I was on the point of turning back—I must unwittingly have trespassed—when I heard a voice of the most melodious sweetness saying:

'Oh, do come in! You must have lost your way.'

I looked up startled, and there across the laurel-hedge, coming towards me over the sunlit lawn, was the original of the pastel portrait—a tall, slender, graceful woman with some sort of a light blue dress cut in old-fashioned style. The proudly posed little head was bare; the great masses of chestnut hair coiled loosely, catching stray gleams of sunshine that turned the copper into gold; the dark brown eyes looked at me with a long appealing gaze, so different from the usual quick glance, withdrawn instantly; the face was pale and slightly drawn, as if by sorrow or suffering, and the rosy lips were slightly parted. Graciousness itself was in her manner as she advanced and held the gate open, repeating her invitation:

'Do come in. We see so few strangers here, and you must be so tired and hot.'

I raised my hat and passed in.

'Pray forgive me,' I said. 'I had no idea I was trespassing so near inhabited places.'

'Oh, it's not trespassing. You are most welcome. In this retired spot every stranger is a friend. Not that you are a stranger. I knew you would come to-day.'

'I fear I am sailing under false colours,' I said. 'You could hardly have expected me, for I only arrived in this country yesterday, and knew no living soul here. I am loath to break an illusion so pleasant and flattering to myself, but I fear you take me for some one more fortunate than I am in having a title to your welcome and your friendship.'

My words sounded stiff and formal and artificial to myself beside her frank and kindly greeting. Every word, every gesture, every movement of hers was so eminently instinct with the breeding and manners of ancient race, of a culture so assured of itself, that it could afford to be perfectly natural, of the frank friendliness and fearless innocence of a child to whom no wrong or harsh thing has ever been done or said.

'Oh, I know,' she said. 'But I have dreamed three nights of a stranger coming who was to do something—I don't know what—but something so good for us, and I was sure he would come. And now here you are, and I am keeping you standing at the gate while I am chattering, and you must be so hot and tired, and I haven't even offered you a cup of tea. Do come in; it's just ready!'

'Do you live all alone in this fairy palace?' I said, as we walked side by side across the smooth lawn to the house.

'With my mother and two sisters,' she replied. 'But, you know, they do all the work; I am the lazy drone. Alas! I am not very strong, and so I read and paint and dream a lot, and they are so good to me!'

'And you are?'

'Morag!'

CHAPTER IV

I ALMOST ejaculated 'Morag the Seal!' so surprised was I at this sudden utterance of the name which had been so prominent in my thoughts, and so often brought to my notice during the last twenty-four hours. Was this gracious lady who walked beside me, welcoming me to her own pleasant sunshiny house, the mysterious seal-woman who lured men to their death, and then laughed at them from the wash of the waves? Could this be the Morag who was shot in the sea with a button from Sandy Macpherson's kilt, and who lay naked on the shining sands at break of day with her great brown eyes wide open, and looking with that long gaze that tugs a man's heart, and who was to be buried in the ruined kirk? It was nonsense; the ideas would not fit. This Morag was alive and real and wholesome, and among eminently real surroundings. Morag the Seal must belong to the dim twilight, moonlit seas, and darksome glens. I could not associate that strange weird legend with this bright kindly-looking house, that breathed of old-world courtesy and refinement, like the sweet scents of potpourri and lavender, any more than I could

associate the idea of the cruel inhuman seal-woman with the form of a goddess and the heart of a beast, with the gentle sweetness of disposition that so markedly characterized my companion. These ideas take long to tell, but very rapidly they flashed through my head. My mind must have been reflected in my face, for she looked quickly at me. We were just by a long rose-wreathed French window, and about to enter the house.

'You have heard my name before,' she said. 'Do tell me where. So few know us about here now.'

'It is a beautiful name,' I prevaricated. 'Yes! I have heard it. It is not an unusual name in the West Highlands, is it?'

'It is an old name in my family,' she replied. 'I never heard it anywhere else. Tell me, where did you hear it?'

I thought a moment—I could not tell her of 'Morag the Seal'—then I said:

'I have seen a pastel drawing, a hundred years old, with a tarnished frame and the gilding worn and the glass dusty and stained; but the picture is fresh as ever, and underneath is written in a fine sloping Italian hand the word "Morag" and the date, a century ago.'

'Oh, I know that picture!' she cried. 'I know it! Fancy your having seen it! It is my great-grandfather's youngest sister. There are all sorts of stories about her. But where did you see it?'

'I am staying at Airton House, and the picture is in my bedroom.'

'Oh, how dreadful!' she cried. 'You are not

really staying there? Oh, I beg your pardon! I had no right to speak like that, but I can't bear to think of your being with those cruel Bradley brothers.'

As we talked we had entered the room through the French window. It was a library, seemingly, very peaceful and yet bright and cheery—a room wherein it seemed impossible to be in a hurry or angry or anything but calm, with the stately refinement of the best society of the last century. Books were all round, beautifully bound in rich sober-toned morocco. The carpet and furniture were similarly rich and quiet in colour. The somewhat heavy style of decoration was relieved by many flowers arranged with exquisite taste, and on a table beside a deep couch a bright tea-equipage sparkled, and a silver urn was steaming hospitably.

'I'm so sorry you should be anxious on my account,' I said, 'but really I don't think there's much to be afraid of. It's not the Bradley brothers you know, only one of them—Sir John—and he seems a mild and inoffensive old man.'

'Oh, do forgive me!' she said, looking at me with her long steady gaze. 'I ought not to say anything, but somehow I can't look on you as a stranger. I feel as if I had known you all my life. Tell me, why is it that you have been so much in my dreams, though I never saw you before, and now you suddenly appear out of nowhere?'

'I am no psychologist,' I said, 'only a very commonplace lawyer. Still, I have the same feeling. I can't explain it, but I seem to have known

you always. I suppose those who believe in such things would say we were together in our last incarnation. To me, I confess, the explanation is almost more puzzling than the fact.'

She was sitting on the couch, and I in a deep comfortable library chair opposite to her. She handed me a cup of delicious tea. Never in my life, I think, have I tasted anything so refreshing.

'Oh, I don't know,' she said; 'I've never studied those things. I am very ignorant, I fear. Have we really lived before? I only know my dreams. I have been delicate all my life, I think, and I am often so tired I can't work like the others, and they pet me, and I dream and dream. I wonder where mother is,' she said, with a sudden change of tone, and she went to the window and called, 'Mother! dear mother!'

I thought I heard a faint answering call, but she clearly did not, for she called through the door again:

'Mother! dear mother! Oh, she is so busy! She'll come presently. I hope she will come while you are here. I should so like you to know my mother. You see, she and my sisters have to work so hard. We keep very few servants, and I am just a drag on them. It's only in the water that I feel really alive. Don't you love to swim by moonlight?'

'Rather!' I replied, for she had unwittingly touched one of my favourite diversions. 'Do you know, I once swam from Sestos to Abydos by moonlight—a glorious Grecian moonlight, too.'

She was looking at me with that long steady look

of hers, her deep magnetic eyes gleaming with enthusiasm.

'How splendid! Leander's swim! Oh, how I should have loved it! I couldn't have done it, though. Even in the water I soon tire, though I am far better there than on land. Ay di me! what a poor useless creature I am, and my spirit is so strong! I just long to do all the things that other people do—to ride, and run, and dance, and excel in all sorts of games. I do it all in imagination. I wonder why on earth I should have all these fancies, when I can never in this world gratify them. But from a child I have always loved the dear sea, to see it flashing all its jewels like a bride in the sunshine; or at sunset, when the colours of the sky melt into the sea, and you can't tell which are islands and which are clouds, and Tir nan Oig seems so close—the land of honeymoon, you know; but best of all by moonlight, when the ripples break the silver light into silver lances. Oh, you must think I am raving, but it was the one thing my dear old father, who is now in Tir nan Oig, allowed me to do freely. He was a great swimmer himself, and I might bathe and swim whenever I would; and as quite a child I used to dive into the rock-pools and bring up beautiful shells for him and my dear mother. Do you know, they used to say that picture you saw was like me.'

'It is very like,' I replied—'so like that, when I first saw you, I thought you were certainly the original, forgetting for the moment that it was a hundred years old.'

'I am hardly so much as that yet; but it was a great compliment, for she—my great-grand-aunt, wasn't she?—I never can quite remember how those puzzling relationships go—was supposed to be very beautiful.'

'She must have been beautiful as a dream,' I said.

'The very phrase they used about her, though they said she was a witch. In some of our old letters it was said that if she had lived a hundred years earlier she would have been burnt. It used to be said that she sat on the rocks and sang, and the sailor-boys were so in love with her that they jumped overboard and died at her feet. I don't believe a word of it myself. The only things really authentic about her were stories of her wonderful power of healing. You know, it was just about the time of the French Revolution that she lived, and people were wild about Mesmer then; and we have sheaves of letters from Paris begging her to go over there to heal along with the great Master, as they called him, for they said she had the same power. I have always felt drawn towards this weird ancestress of mine.'

'But, pardon me,' I said; 'you speak of your ancestress. Surely you are not——'

'Morag Cameron. Why, of course, I am! Who did you think I was? I am the eldest daughter of the last Cameron of Ard na Righ, the point or headland of the King, for in the long ago days we were really Kings here—long before there was such a thing as a King of Scotland; and now the Bradley

brothers have taken it all, and we have only this little bit that we can call our own, and they covet that.'

'Then this is—— ?'

'The old Dower House, they call it.'

'How extraordinary!' I exclaimed. 'The very place of all others I wanted to see—the old Dower House—and you who seem like an old friend in it, and here we are talking so familiarly, as if we had known each other for years.'

'I believe we have,' she interpolated.

'It is like a dream,' I continued—'like the prosaic commonplace of life melting into a dream too delicious to be true.'

'Say, rather, like a dream becoming real,' she said. 'But if you are interested in these old-world stories, I can show you something that I think you will like, if you will just move this tea-table away, and bring up that card-table with the big book on it.'

I did so, and in bringing it up in front of her I naturally sat down on the couch beside her as she opened the book, which was apparently a collection of most exquisite etchings of the neighbourhood.

'Here,' she said, 'is a view of the old castle. You know it, of course, as it is now. This is, I fancy, largely imaginative, but it shows the castle as it was when it was complete and inhabited. That man on horseback before the door is supposed to be meant for my great-great-grandfather, the father of the witch. Here is what they called the Gipsy Glen. You must have passed it. Then there is this house, the Dower House—that is about as it is now.'

We bent together over the book and, I know not how, I found my arm was round her, and her little head almost rested on my shoulder.

'I hardly have the courage to look at this book when I am alone,' she said, and there was a certain quiver in her voice as she spoke. 'It seems such a change from what we were to what we are now, and there seems no hope. Oh, don't think me a mean coward! It must sound so like that. Indeed, I don't complain usually, but you are you, and I feel that you will understand.'

'I do,' I said; 'I understand perfectly, and I only wish it were in my power to do something more than sympathize.'

I know not by what magic of sympathy it was that it seemed then the most natural thing in the world that I should bend and kiss the soft cheek that lay so confidingly close to my lips, and that she should take the action as a perfectly natural one. We were in a strange world, however it were to be accounted for.

'I am sure you will,' she said. 'My dreams have been always of you bringing great help to us; always our strong help and stand-by in all trouble.'

She seemed to cling closer to me as she spoke, and I felt as though my one mission in life was to shelter her against every ill and every trouble.

'Listen,' she murmured at last, 'I know you have lost the documents proving our pedigree before my great-grandfather, and the story of the Bradley brothers. Isn't it so?'

'It is,' I answered, in great wonder where she could have got this information from.

'I can tell you,' she said. 'They are in the old castle, but no one, not even Sir John Bradley, has the slightest idea that they are there.'

'Can you tell me where—how to find them?'

'I fear not. There is a secret hiding-place behind the turret stair, where you enter by the little door at the top of that stair at the back. I used to play there when I was a tiny child. Some day I'll meet you there, and show you. I have seen it all in my dreams.'

'But how in the world did they ever get there? They were in the old kirk, were they not?'

'Yes, they were, but the kirk fell into ruin. A new one was built, but the poor old minister got into some trouble. Our people took pity on him, and brought him to stay at the castle. We protected him, and he brought his records with him till they should be asked for; but before they were he died, so no one knew where he had hidden them. The story went about that he had burnt or destroyed them, and the memory of them faded; but I know, and now you will help me, won't you?'

'With my life, dear,' I said.

'Now you must go,' she said. 'I am sorry to drive you away, but it is the time that I have to go and lie down. Tell me first what is your name? Isn't it strange, so like a dream, that I who know you so well and trust you so entirely to help us should not even know your name.'

'My name is Ralph Kingsburgh.'

'Ralph! It is a nice name, a good name, and Kingsburgh. Let me see: Ard na Righ—the headland of the King, the King's headland, the King's burgh. The old prophecy! Yes! you are he who had to come. You must come and see me again, and you must know my mother.'

We had walked towards the window. In the shadow behind the curtain I once more clasped her close, and kissed her unresisting lips; then I passed out again on to the sunny lawn, and took my way through the wicket-gate out into the forest-path.

I suppose I retraced my steps, but it was quite mechanically. My brain whirled with the adventure, and presented picture after picture, recalling all the graciousness of that sweet lady, and re-enacting the whole scene, till somehow or other I found myself again beside my bicycle, on the spot from which I had started on that afternoon's quest.

It was getting late, so I mounted at once and rode back along the forest way to the main road, and so round the loch; and now, strange to say, the glamour began to fade and questions presented themselves. Who could be this odd unconventional lady whom I had thus met in such strange fashion? She had spoken of mother and sisters, yet no other human soul had I seen or heard. A queer person too, truly, to throw herself into the arms of the first passing man who dropped in, and whose very name she did not know. Then, again, how on earth could she or anyone live there? No one knew of their presence seemingly, or I should surely have heard of it, and how on the face of all the earth did they

get provisions over, the merest necessaries of life? There was no path, no way to the house. Altogether the thing was mysterious, and I wondered that it had not struck me in that light before.

To say that I was seriously discomposed would be an understatement. After I had rounded the head of the loch, and was riding directly towards Airton House, the whole adventure through which I had passed in the afternoon began to assume a distinctly unreal aspect. It was as though a fantastic and bizarre patch, irrelevant and unconnected with the rest of my life, had been suddenly intruded upon it. A patch, moreover, which in itself was full of unexplained and unnatural elements.

I had the habit, frequent with lawyers, especially those whose practice lies mainly in chambers, whenever I met with a difficult knot to unravel, of mentally arranging all the circumstances which I knew, and grouping them so as to see what points were missing, and what possible conclusion could be drawn from those which were ascertained. Almost mechanically now I began to review all that had occurred to me since my arrival at Ard na Righ, and I found that many of them had some sort of bearing on the strange experience of that afternoon, though many clues were still missing.

There was the ruined kirk, the tappings of the mysterious carpenter in the house where Donald said that no one lived, and that the wright had died; the grave being dug; and Donald's story of the burial of Morag the Seal, confirmed to some extent by the doctor; and Sir John's curious excite-

ment at the mention of the legend. Here, then, the only three people I had as yet met each in his own way regarded the story as more than a mere fairy-tale; also they mentioned others. Clearly some sort of appearance whose description all agreed in was commonly believed to occur.

It is unlikely that a number of people should all have the same belief without any ground whatsoever, and so far as I could see the possible grounds resolved themselves into two—namely, either what is commonly called supernatural, or some living person playing a trick. Now, though I was far from being superstitious, and generally took very little interest in stories of wraiths and ghostly appearances, which I looked on as quite out of my line, yet I was well aware that sensible and clear-headed men, who did investigate such things, considered the evidence of their reality to be very strong; and in the face of this I felt it would be premature to deny absolutely either solution, though certainly all my predisposition prompted me to exhaust all natural explanations before accepting one with which I was wholly unfamiliar, and in which I saw an enormous liability to fraud and delusion.

Leaving, then, these two possible explanations to wait for further evidence, there were other points to be considered—the pastel drawing of Morag, and the shadow burial outside my room last night. One line of evidence connected Morag with the weird seal stories, with mysterious drownings and uncanny burials; another with the old family of Camerons.

I preferred the latter as being more within my own experience; but this, too, had its difficulties.

Then in a calm and judicial spirit I looked at my experience of the afternoon. Many of the previous points had been repeated or come up in a new shape, but most curious of all had been my own state of mind from the moment when I left my bicycle and walked along the wood-path. I had been astonished at nothing, and yet in sober earnestness there had been enough to astonish me—the house to which the path had not been trodden for ages, the people who lived alone there, and whom no one knew of. People, did I say? I had only seen one, and that one certainly unusual enough. She had spoken of mother and sisters and servants, yet I had seen none. How could I in cool blood have conceived myself thus being entertained by a strange young lady, in a strange empty house, seemingly dropped from nowhere into a pathless wood, and not being at all surprised! It was barely thinkable.

Again, these were apparently the old Cameron family, living at their old home—the Dower House. How came it that no one knew they were there?—not even the gossiping doctor, who knew every one's business; not even Donald the groom-boy.

I had not thought of the house being the Dower House when I came to it, though it seemed really obvious that it must be, and I was not surprised at anything I heard. I seemed to have been so bewitched and hypnotized by the beauty of Morag, and by the sweet endearments that had passed between us, that I had accepted all manner of

absurdities as if they were real, just as one does in a dream. Could this be the solution? Was it a dream? If so, it was a most extraordinary psychic phenomenon; for though I had dreamed, as most people have, I had never had experience of anything so strangely real and detailed. This looked unlikely. Then there was the quaint old legend of Morag. The thought *would* recur in spite of me, could this possibly be true? There was the weird fascination—I could not conceal from myself that I had been fascinated; that had it been possible I would have stayed there talking to Morag, and exchanging caresses till—well, I hardly knew, in sooth, what would have torn me away, so long as she had allowed me to stay. Indeed, in a sense the glamour was on me still. In spite of all my cool reasoning I knew well enough that if I had the chance I would go back, and that I was even then hoping for a chance to do so. Then her enthusiasm over swimming by moonlight, and, in faith, the great brown eyes, with their steady gaze, were much more the eyes of an animal than of a human being.

Confound it! No, that explanation will not do till we have exhausted every other possible one.

There remained the possibility that these were, indeed, the old Camerons; that Miss Morag was a playful girl full of practical jokes, who masqueraded as the traditional seal of her family legends, and traded on the likeness to her far-away ancestress. Had she heard of my coming, and planned out this stage-play for my benefit? Perhaps to lure me away from my professional investigations on behalf

of my client, whom she must regard as the supplanter of her race?

In some ways this idea presented more difficulties than any other, yet it appealed to me. Possibly my vanity was flattered by the thought that this comedy had been played for my benefit. True, it wasn't convincing; it wasn't really very well done, but all the same I had accepted it, swallowed every absurdity, just because a pretty girl had looked at me, and had let me kiss her. Well! well! all men are gullible, I suppose, when a pretty girl is in question, and why not I as well as another? It had never chanced to me before, but then I expect all the sons of Adam must come to it sooner or later. So let that remain for the solution—for the present, at all events—and that being so, Miss Morag had perhaps given me a valuable hint as to where the missing records were. She had said, too, that she would meet me in the old castle. This would be an assignation worth keeping; perhaps Miss Morag would yet turn up trumps. I must certainly go and see her again, but I would let her know next time that I wasn't to be gulled with these commonplace tricks. We would talk sensibly. Sensibly! Well, a kiss or so would not be out of the way. Oh, hang it! Whenever I thought of Morag there was that confounded fascination coming over me. It was like an uncanny malaria.

To change the current of my thoughts I began reviewing the case of Sir John Bradley, and the various points we had cleared so far, and by a natural sequence I remembered the doctor's letter.

I was now just passing the stables, which lay close to the road as it skirted the policies between the house and the sea. Here I saw my friend Donald, busy washing down the pony-cart that had brought me yesterday evening from the station. I turned in to have a talk with him.

'Sir John has not come back yet, I suppose?' I said.

'No, sir! I'm not expecting him till rather late. He's gone a long way out beyond Alt na Crois, and the coachman is sure to take the pair slowly coming back. I heard the cook say it would be eight o'clock before they would have dinner to-night.'

'Tell me, Donald,' I queried, 'do you know a queer old character called Allan Kerr?'

'Do you mean the little loonie, sir? Strange that you should be asking that now.'

'Why is it strange, Donald?'

'Well, sir, because the poor little loonie has disappeared.'

'Disappeared! What on earth do you mean, Donald?'

'Well, sir, gone—that's what I mean.'

He spread out his hands with an inimitable gesture.

'I suppose you mean that he has gone away on a visit, or something. Well, that's not unusual. He'll come back, I suppose. I would like to see him when he does. I fancy he could tell me some things I want to know.'

'Many people think that,' said Donald, with rather a meaning intonation. 'I've heard folk say that the loonie knew too much for his own safety,

poor wee man! There was some that wanted him out of the way for fear of what he knew.'

'Oh, but I suppose he has simply gone away on some business, and is coming back soon. Don't you think so, Donald?'

'No, sir; to be plain, I don't. You see, the poor loonie couldn't travel—not, that is, beyond the district where he lived—and every day he was seen about, just never more than half a dozen miles from his own cottage. But now since three days past he has never been seen, and his cottage is empty, and the fire cold; and I never remember such a thing since I've known the loonie, and that's about all my life.'

'Perhaps he's gone to help bury Morag the Seal,' I said, half in jest, but half to see what Donald would say to this insinuation.

'Can't say, sir,' he replied after a pause. 'The Good Book tells us that the dead bury the dead, but I don't know. They tell me there's been folk that was dead seen burying Morag, and they say that Niell Cameron the wright would be making her coffin, but, indeed, I never saw it myself.'

Donald was cautious evidently, and not to be drawn.

'Tell me, Donald, was Morag buried last night?'

'And, indeed, sir, I can't tell you that. You, maybe, know that the Fiscal came, and Sandy Macpherson and his son swore they had never said a word about Morag. Sandy he says to me afterwards that there was no manner of sense in letting fool-bodies like that know everything. But for me,

I would not be saying the Fiscal was a fool exactly, though he's from the South country, and they don't seem to learn much sense there; still, but all the same, I'm thinking there was a burial of some sort last night. I sleep over the stables, you know, and I heard a tramping, and I peeped out through the loft door, and there were some of those gipsy trash that the laird allows to live up the glen carrying a coffin—at least, it looked like that to me.'

'What time was that, Donald?'

'It would be just after the stable clock struck twelve, sir. Of course I'm not saying it would be Morag. Indeed, I never heard that Morag was buried anywhere but in the ruined kirk. Still, they did say that Morag was to be buried last night, and certainly that gipsy trash were burying something or other about the time. Perhaps it was one of themselves, but dear knows where they were going to put it anyhow.'

My mind recurred at once to the shadow pantomime opposite my window at twelve o'clock the previous night. I did not think well to say anything about this to Donald, but here was another clue. This mysterious business was somehow or other connected with the gipsies, and also, perhaps, with this strange and elusive Morag.

I said good night to Donald and rode on, but my theory did not look so clear now. If Miss Morag Cameron were the perpetrator of practical jokes that I had assumed, she could scarcely carry them so far as to be buried by a gipsy tribe and be alive again to fascinate and mystify me the following afternoon.

The possibility remained that this incident of the burial seen by Donald from the loft, seen by me in shadow, was a wholly disconnected fact, whose solution was yet to be found. In the meantime I was disposed to favour this idea; it promised a possibility of a material explanation. The seal-legend was picturesque, redolent of the soil, and as a bit of folk-lore I loved it; but I could not bring myself to believe it an actual fact. A ghost I might possibly accept, if there were no other solution, on the authority of many sane and reliable men who had studied such matters. I could not think that, being in perfectly sound physical health, I had dreamed such an astoundingly realistic dream. No wonder I clung to the material explanation as long as it would hold water as the one reliable plank in an ocean of wild absurdity.

Sir John came in tired with his long drive, and after dinner we had but a short sederunt over the papers. Only one new point came up this time. The papers we were examining related to the legal transfer of the estate to the elder Sir John, consequent on the non-payment of the loans. All were in order, and the proceedings, as usual in such cases, were purely formal; but among the printed forms was a page apparently torn from a counsel's jotting-book, roughly scribbled, and full of references to authorities and cases, bearing that some question had been raised at some time by the Cameron of that day, or on his behalf, as to the receipt of the money alleged to have been lent to him. His acknowledgment was all in proper form, sufficiently

stamped and duly signed, but it seemed that there was no evidence either in the banking account of Sir John Bradley or of Mr. Cameron of any such payment. However, the receipt was evidence enough, and as a lawyer I was not surprised to find that this point was entirely dropped, for it never appeared again.

It was, however, sufficiently curious and interesting for me to ask Sir John if he knew of its having been raised. His memory was vague—I thought unusually so, considering how plainly he remembered most points, even minute ones, connected with his title. On this he seemed embarrassed and ill at ease, but he promised to look up his father's bank-books and satisfy me entirely. He was sure the objection had been answered, only he couldn't quite recall how.

Just as we were about to part for the night came a note from Dr. MacCulloch, brought by his man, asking me to dine with him on the morrow.

'Go, by all means,' said Sir John. 'I look on the doctor as our greatest stand-by in our investigations. He will tell you more than any other living man can.'

So we said good night, and I retired to my room.

CHAPTER V

It has been said by a wise man, somewhere or other, that the courage or the optimism that can manifest itself at four o'clock in the morning deserves the highest medal ever bestowed on valour or fortitude. No such medal would have been gained by me that night. I presume at that hour the vitality is at its lowest, partial sleep clouds the brain, which is yet unable wholly to drift into that land of fancy which my friend Donald appropriately named Tir nan Oig, and therefore ill-dreams beset one, and every worry that ever perplexed the brain, even though long relegated to the realms of forgotten lumber, crowds up, overpowering the will, and mopes and mows and gibbers over our fevered heads. Thus did I wake, hearing the distant stable clock chiming four, and, unable to sleep again, found my pillow hot against my head that sought vainly for a cool spot. I turned and turned again, tried fresh places and new positions, all to no purpose, and through it all memory was busy, continually telling me—for it did not seem at all that I was telling myself—what an prodigious ass I had been, what an inextricable mess I had got myself into, entangled with a woman of whom I knew nothing whatsoever, mixed

up in very shady transactions. How in the world was I going to get out of it ? Could I decently get a telegram in the morning summoning me back to town, and give up the whole thing, and return to my orderly commonplace work which I understood, and leave all these strange people to live their own strange lives, as they were doubtless accustomed to do ?

Then, as I half dozed, came the story of Morag the Seal; and strenuously as in the afternoon I had repudiated that superstition, as I then deemed it, so now did I believe it. I had been fascinated after I had been warned of the fascination. Bah ! I was ashamed of myself now. But the thing was done. I had succumbed; there was henceforth no hope for me. I should be found on the shore some day drowned and dead, and the weird barking laugh of the seal would be heard out in the wash of the waves.

It looks incredible in broad daylight and in sober sense that I could ever have thought such things, but I appeal to any man who has thus waked at four o'clock in the morning to say if he has not experienced somewhat similar sensations.

Then, growing more wakeful, sober sense came to my aid. Complete wakefulness was the only cure. I jumped out of bed and shook myself, and taking my bath-sponge I doused my face and head with cold water. I was myself again, and was returning to bed, believing that now I should sleep soundly, and the distressing half sleep condition was conquered.

As I was getting into bed my eye fell on the window at the foot of my bed. There was the curious light again, like the first light of a magic-lantern before the slides are exhibited. Broad awake and all alert now, I ran to the window and threw it open, determined to discover the secret of this weird appearance. I leaned out, but before I could do so the light vanished suddenly, nor could I anywhere see anything whatsoever to account for it. There was a faint moonlight, and the little court was visible, though not very clearly. By leaning over I could just manage to see the edges of the boards that fastened up the window below my room, which I had before investigated. All was dead still, save far away the howl of a dog—I suppose at the kennels, or some distant farm—and a few of the usual sounds of the night creatures. Faintly I could hear the lap of the tiny waves on the pebbles across the road. Nothing else.

Suddenly and from near at hand there came a long, low, blood-curdling cry. Was it human, or a sea-bird, or an owl, or was it something unearthly? It was night in the West Highlands, where people believed in such things. What if they had reason to do so? I was in a strange haunted place, with all manner of uncanny legends about it. I was uncomfortable, and on the edge of expectation. Then suddenly and without warning, again came the same cry, and then unmistakably a human voice.

'Oh, my God, my God! For God's sake, let me go!'

What should I do or say? I strove to call an answer, to assure the sufferer, who thus cried in the night, that he was heard; to ask how I could help or release him or her. But let the reader think what he will, despise me as he will—he cannot despise me more than I despised myself—I could not move, I could not speak. It was as though an iron hand were laid upon me, paralysing all my vital functions. I felt like a spectator prisoned in a dead body, and compelled to witness appalling tragedies, without power to look away or to stir a finger to avert the most horrible wrongs. Those who have experienced a similar sensation will perfectly understand me; for those who have not, no amount of explanation would bring conviction. Thus the minutes crawled past on leaden feet, and the quiet of the night was unbroken. That weird cry was not repeated, and by degrees, as I grew chill beside the open window, the power of life and motion returned. I was myself again, and I crept back to bed, numb and cold, and horribly, deadly sleepy. I was hardly conscious of getting there before I fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep, from which the footman's knock with difficulty aroused me.

As I dressed I thought over the events of the night, and recurred to the possibility that in the air of the West Highlands I had developed a wonderful faculty of dreaming. To set this at rest, I decided to tell my host of the occurrence, and with his help, which I doubted not he would give, to demonstrate whether it were really a dream or no.

Accordingly, at breakfast I mentioned the cry

that I had heard, or, to put it plainly, thought I had heard the night before. Sir John paused the fraction of a moment, and looked certainly anxious and uneasy, but instantly recovering himself, he said :

'So you heard it, too, did you ? I hoped you would not have been disturbed. It must have sounded very alarming to anyone hearing it in the middle of the night, and without power of knowing what it was. The explanation, however, is quite simple. One of the gipsies from the glen just below the house was fighting drunk in the road, and the police arrested him. His companions wanted to release him, but they are mortally afraid of the police. I heard the disturbance. I suppose you didn't hear me go downstairs ? I did, however, and took my keeper and the deer-stalker, who are fortunately sleeping in the house just now—in the farm-house wing, you know. It was just as we went out that the poor devil cried out as you heard. 'Pon my word, I was sorry for him.'

'But then, Sir John,' I said, 'what about that light on the wall opposite to my room ?'

'Oh, that,' he said; 'it's a very simple optical effect.' Again that curious pause for a fraction of a moment. 'You see, when the moon shines at a certain angle on the window of your room, it is reflected on the wall opposite, and makes that appearance. I have seen it myself, and was considerably startled by it at first.'

I had, I own, felt a certain doubt which I could not account for regarding Sir John's story of the

gipsy. Natural and obvious as it was, and frankly told, yet I guessed somehow that it was invented to account for something he could not or did not want to explain, and this conviction deepened with his explanation of the patch of light on the wall; for, as a fact, the moonlight was faint and dim at the time, and even its direct rays hardly threw a shadow, and though the idea of the angle might be correct enough, a reflected gleam of moonlight could never make that strong patch of light which had roused my attention. Still, Sir John had frankly explained the two puzzling facts in a very natural way, and I could see no other theory on which they could be accounted for.

He continued: 'There is another thing, however, I must candidly tell you, Mr. Kingsburgh, which gives me far more uneasiness, and that is the disappearance of poor Allan Kerr. I dare say you've heard some of my people speak of it, and no doubt they may have told you that I had an ill-will towards the poor fellow. I need hardly say to you that there is not an atom of truth in that. I was always most friendly with him, though I was certainly at times indignant that he should encourage and foster the gross and puerile superstitions which do so much harm to our people. He was rather touched in the head, poor chap! In England he would have been taken care of, but it is otherwise here, as you know. However, now he's gone, and it is really the most mysterious disappearance. I am offering fifty pounds reward myself for tidings of him, whether alive or dead, but I can't bring myself to believe

there was any foul play. I don't think he had an enemy. Every one in the district seemed fond of him, and he was just a mine of information about everything connected with this district. Dr. MacCulloch used to apply to him often about points he was uncertain of.'

My host's distress aboutt he 'loonie' seemed unmistakably genuine, and his offer of a reward was so generous, especially considering his somewhat penurious nature, that I gathered the missing man must be of some more than usual importance to him.

'Do you think, Sir John,' I said, 'that this Allan Kerr would have been of any help in our investigations into your family history and title?'

'I am sure of it,' he said, 'and for that very reason, apart altogether from my liking for the little chap, it is a most cruel blow to me. There were things that he could have told us that no one else could possibly have known. In fact, I was only waiting for you to come down here to have a regular examination of the little man. I was afraid to cross-question him by myself, lest in my inexperience I should ask the wrong questions or omit what was most essential.'

We had done breakfast by this time, and strolled to the front door, where the air was balmy and the day fair as yesterday. I reminded Sir John of his promise to show me the old castle.

'Delighted,' he said. 'It's practically all in ruins, you know. In a sense, it's a disgrace to us. When the last Camerons who lived there fell on evil days,

as I told you, they left the castle and lived in the farm-house that had been built for a tenant close under the shelter of the castle; but they always cherished the hope of returning, and so the castle was never entirely dismantled. And I believe one of them used to entertain his tenants there long after the rents had ceased to be paid to him, and when the whole property was in the hands of trustees. Then they got a little more money together and moved to the Dower House, and I have heard that then the children used often to come and play in the castle, and talk of the time when they would be back in their old home once more. Poor people! how sorry I am for them! Though, of course, we are rightfully here, still they thought it was all theirs. Well, then my father acquired it, and he built this part; and it was his dream to restore the old castle, and make a stately mansion-house, throwing the two parts together. It would have made a magnificent place, with very few equals in the Highlands. But somehow he never could bring himself to touch the castle, though he had a lot of plans from the most celebrated architects for the restoration; and he would very seldom enter the place. And so it has just mouldered and crumbled away in the condition in which the last Camerons left it; for I, too, have done nothing. My improvements, however, are just waiting for time to take them up, and partly for your good offices; for I did not feel that I could lay out any more money, or, indeed, do anything to the old place, until I had your assurance about my title.

Now, come along; you shall see everything there is to be seen.'

So saying, he unlocked his bureau, and took out a huge bunch of keys; and we walked along the front, turning to the right from the front door till we came to the great door of the castle. This Sir John unlocked with some difficulty, the lock evidently being very rusty, for it shrieked most weirdly as the key turned, forced round by my companion's full strength.

The great entrance-hall was a strange sight. It had once been very handsomely furnished, but now rats had eaten holes in the floors, and picked the skin from the deer's heads that hung on the walls. The carpets had long disappeared, but here and there fragments of hangings, plaids and the like, still clung to the nails that had held them to the walls. Doors were on three sides, and up the stairs one could see doors opening on the first landing; but above this was an open ruin and the bare stones of the wall, though the roof seemed fairly watertight. Looking up the stairs, there were frames on the walls that must once have held pictures, but these had long ago rotted away, or been devoured by vermin. We looked into the rooms right and left, Sir John carefully unlocking the doors and locking them again behind us. These were in much the same state as the hall—furniture, handsome once, now entirely gone to decay; carpets perished; the seats of the chairs vanished; such piteous ruin and desolation as I had never beheld, and certainly hope never to behold again.

All these rooms looked to the front of the house. Under the broad and handsome stone staircase was a door leading to what had once been a library. I could only, as a book-lover, hope that the poor books had been removed to some place of safety before the abandonment of the castle, for not a trace of them remained on the ruins that had been bookcases. The windows of this room looked on to a quadrangular court. Sir John opened one to let me see out. Not many windows looked into it from the opposite side. In the corner to the right was a tower, evidently the same as that which I could see from my bedroom window. The court-yard itself was overgrown with rank weeds and grasses and nettles. Clearly no human foot had disturbed it for a very long time It was a cheerless, melancholy prospect.

We turned to the left through this room, and passed through a door at the farther end which gave access to one of the noblest of old feudal halls that I had ever seen. The solid oak floor had almost withstood the ravages of rats and other vermin. Some stained glass still remained in the windows, which had, however, been mended and patched with plain glass where the panes were broken ; but there was sufficient of the original still left to show many shields bearing the Cameron cognizance, quartered with the arms of many other noble Scottish houses.

This hall ran the entire depth of the castle from front to back, this end being, as I have indicated, considerably deeper than the centre, built by Sir John's father, and in height was level with the roof

of the castle front, being thus equal in height to three stories of ordinary rooms. The open rafters showed magnificent oak timbering, the crossing and recrossing beams being a study in massive wood-work. At the end towards the sea, away from the front, was a huge fireplace, the iron dogs still remaining, and the great stone mantel still stained with smoke that told of many a hospitable blaze.

Near the door by which we had entered a cork-screw winding stair led up to the musicians' gallery. We ascended by this, and after taking another look at the magnificent hall from this elevation, we emerged by a door at the back on to a passage leading along the first floor of the castle. Here were suites of rooms much like those on the ground-floor, only more dilapidated—a magnificent drawing-room, the ceiling gone, and the beams showing the walls above, from which even the plaster was gone in most parts, and the windows mere eyeless holes, the roof, however, still remaining. Other rooms, apparently reception-rooms, boudoirs, and such-like, had in some cases their ceilings entire or nearly so; in other cases not; but always the floors were rotten, eaten into holes, and certainly very unsafe to walk over. At the back, on our left as we traversed the passage, were bedrooms; in some of them the pitiful remnants of stately furniture still remained. Sir John called my attention to one peculiarly handsome suite of rooms, as being the royal apartments where Charles II. had slept on a visit to the Camerons, and where, he said, an

ancestor of his had entertained Prince Charlie soon after his first landing at Moidart.

'But what about the rooms at the back, Sir John?' I said. 'Can we see those?'

'I'll show you as much as I can,' he replied; 'but, in fact, that part of the castle is really in worse repair than what you have seen. Most of it is so unsafe that I am told it must be entirely gutted before it can be repaired, and even to do this will involve considerable risk to the workmen employed. I have had estimates from a Glasgow firm, and perhaps, when my title is made quite clear, I may have it put in order for my marriage. I have been too much of a hermit all my life, but I hope to revive the old traditions of the Camerons, and to exercise hospitalities worthy of my race.'

The passage we were traversing now turned sharp round to the left, skirting this side of the courtyard, other ranges of rooms being on our right. These, so far as I could judge, were mostly small rooms. On our left were windows looking on the courtyard. We had gone perhaps half the length of this passage, when we came to a sudden stop in front of a yawning pit where the floor had completely fallen away. A ladder led down into the dark depths, a window-hole (for there was no frame in it) served to throw light a few feet down, and only made the depths look darker still. As I stood a moment contemplating this unexpected barrier to our farther progress, suddenly there sounded from the opposite side a long low wailing cry, just as I had heard it at four o'clock that morning. At the same moment,

at a window in the corner, apparently a window of the tower, I saw for a second a wild savage-looking gipsy face, which was instantly withdrawn. I caught my companion's arm.

'Did you hear that? It was the same cry I heard this morning; and that face at the window, what on earth is it?'

'Nonsense!' he said. 'Your nerves seem to be a bit shaken, Mr. Kingsburgh. That was just a sea-bird; they give the most eerie shrieks sometimes. You'll soon get used to them up here. It was quite a different cry this morning; that was really a human note. The poor gipsy bellowed like a bull, and then cried pitifully when the police got hold of him.'

'But the face at the window, Sir John?'

'Pure delusion. I fear your imagination has been over-stimulated by our West Highland air. If you have the pluck to come with me down that ladder, we can get into the tower, and I will show you how impossible it is that it could be any real person there.'

My curiosity was so far excited that I caught eagerly at the chance of seeing more.

A lantern hung handily on a nail. I did not at the moment think of how incongruous this was with the statement that no one visited the old castle. The appearance of the lantern would indicate frequent passage along this route, for it was certainly trimmed and ready to light. Sir John struck a match, lighted the lantern, and by its fitful gleam guided himself and me down the ladder and along

a stone passage to a door which he unlocked, and we were within the tower. It was a mere empty shell open to the sky. Flocks of startled pigeons flew out on our entrance with a great clamour and whirling of wings. Then Sir John pointed up to a window over our heads.

'There's the window you saw,' he said. 'Do you think anyone could comfortably look out of that?'

Candidly, I did not. The window, which evidently was the one looking on the courtyard in the corner, was at least twenty feet from the ground, with no support, not even a ledge that the most daring acrobat could cling to. I felt certain now that, clear as it had seemed, it must have been a delusion and, for the first time perhaps in my life, I began to doubt the evidence of my own senses.

My host now unlocked a door in the farther wall of the tower, seemingly leading to the back buildings.

'Look through there, but don't go in,' he said; 'it isn't safe.'

I looked, and certainly felt no desire to go in. The rafters above were in many places simply hanging from their supports in the wall, and masses of flooring and of the plaster of ceilings attached to them looked on the verge of falling. Much of this material had already fallen, and lay in mouldering heaps on the rotting floors below. Walls with great rents in them divided what had been rooms, apparently kitchens or offices of some sort, and some were bulging in a most alarming way. A look

was sufficient. A man would have taken his life in his hand had he attempted to walk through this part of the castle.

As we turned to leave the tower that long low wailing cry sounded again, seemingly close to us.

'There it is again,' I cried.

'Now, you see,' said Sir John; 'a sea-bird flying just over the tower. You will have to get used to the strange sounds of the West Highlands, Mr. Kingsburgh. I expect I should find London as weird as you do Ard na Righ.'

At that moment I glanced upward through the tangle of rafters and ruin that marked the first floor and there, standing on a ledge, which had once been a corbel supporting an arch twenty feet above my head, was the form of Morag, just as I had seen her the previous day. I gave an involuntary cry of alarm.

'What is it,' said my companion.

'There,' I said, pointing up. 'She will certainly fall and be killed.'

'Who?' he queried. 'There can be no human soul in here. Really, Mr. Kingsburgh, either you are exceedingly imaginative, or my old house must be as badly haunted as the folk about here tell me it is.'

I looked again, and sure enough there was no one there, and more than this, the corbel, as I now saw, was absolutely inaccessible. There was no gap or tiniest rift in the wall behind, nor any beam or projecting point to which a monkey could have clung anywhere near it. However it were to be

accounted for, my eyes and possibly my ears, too, were playing me false in this uncanny old castle. Still, at the back of it remained the vague idea that Morag might be shut up somewhere in this grim and perilous ruin, and the remembrance of her beauty, her graciousness, and the whole charm of the adventure of the previous afternoon, roused in my mind an anxiety about her. The next moment reason said: 'This is all nonsense. She could not be at the old Dower House yesterday and here this morning. She could not perch on that corbel. Bah! the whole thing is preposterous! I was just day-dreaming over the remembrance of a bit of love-making yesterday, which had fired my imagination in precise proportion to its unfamiliarity in my later years since I had embarked on serious work, and I must needs see the face of the lady in all manner of absurd places.'

'Come away,' said Sir John. 'There's nothing more to show you, and it is just upon lunch-time.'

In fact, as we left the old castle, having climbed up the ladder again, the gong sounded for lunch.

That afternoon, as Sir John had again to go out on estate business, I devoted myself to a careful examination of his father's banking accounts, with a view of trying to trace the payments to the last Cameron of Ard na Righ of the sums on the default of re-payment of which the estates had passed to the first Sir John Bradley. The receipt was there all in proper form, but the banking account showed nothing clear, and, moreover, parts of it were missing. This was to me an unfamiliar

and most irksome task, for I never loved figures and accounts, and at last I put them aside with a sigh of relief, when I found it was time to dress to go to the doctor's dinner.

Sir John's brougham was waiting to drive me to the doctor's, though it was only about a mile and a half, and I had begged him to allow me to walk, but this he would by no means permit.

I found Dr. MacCulloch active, energetic, and vivacious as ever. Mrs. MacCulloch was a kindly, matronly, somewhat colourless person from Glasgow. Both welcomed me warmly, and the dinner was excellent, the genial doctor talking most of the time, and, as usual, full of local legend and story and family history. Somehow, without any intention on my part, the conversation drifted on to the old Cameron family.

'Isn't it curious?' said the doctor. 'I can't for the life of me remember anything about the last Camerons, whom I used to know so well. They seem to have faded away into oblivion since they left this district, but I expect my wife knows about them.'

'I heard from Miss Morag,' she replied, 'about a month or six weeks ago.'

I started slightly. Here was my mysterious lady coming into practical politics.

'Where were they then?' said the doctor.

'She wrote from some place in Devonshire, I think,' said the lady, 'but really I'm not quite sure where. Anyhow, they were all well, and she spoke of longing for the old home.'

A hundred questions were on the tip of my tongue, but I refrained. I wanted to ask the doctor some special points before I entered on the subject with anyone else.

After dinner we adjourned to the smoking-room, and here, over a choice Havannah, I detailed carefully and fully my experiences of the previous day, only omitting, naturally, the affectionate episodes between Morag and myself, which seemed far too sacred to be touched upon with anyone. Besides that, they were irrelevant to what I wanted to know about. I told him also the various theories I had formed.

'As for your first idea—that Miss Morag was playing you a trick,' he said—'you may dismiss it altogether. Now, look here.' He produced a large map of the district on the other side of the loch. 'See, now! was this the way you went?'

I admitted that it was.

'And here, or hereabouts, is the tree you rested under?'

'Yes.'

'Well! then, here is the path by which you walked, leaving your bicycle here.'

'Quite correct.'

'Well! you see, it leads to a wicket-gate, here, under my finger, by which you get into the grounds of the old Dower House. Here is the house itself.'

'Precisely; that's the very way I went.'

'You will notice this plan is twenty years old. Now, the Dower House is marked here, where you saw it. All the same, you never went to the Dower

House. Again, Miss Morag is undoubtedly the eldest of the Cameron girls, and a very sweet girl I hear she is; but you never saw her, nor ever could have seen her.'

'Oh, nonsense, doctor!' I said. 'You are just speaking in riddles on purpose to mystify me.'

'It is all gospel truth,' he replied; 'but I should never convince you, though I talked till to-morrow. But look here! I have to drive over to the Alt na Crois district to-morrow; my colleague there has a touch of influenza. Drive with me there, if you will be so good. I'll take you up to the Dower House, and convince you that you never saw it, nor Miss Morag. I am an old friend of the Camerons, you know.'

'Humbug!' I said to myself. 'At dinner he said he could remember nothing about them.'

'I shall be delighted,' I said aloud, 'if Sir John can spare me.'

'You are going on his business,' said the doctor, 'and I'll tell him so. But now, putting that theory aside for the moment, for I see you won't give it up readily, I should advise you not to reject too rashly the idea that it was a dream. Your sole reason seems to be that it was more vivid and realistic than dreams generally are. Now, I myself have dreamed in the East, under the spell of hashish, and I assure you I could not tell in the least where the reality ended and the dream began; my own bungalow and servants, as I knew them, were so blended with an Arabian Nights' fantasy. And I was not a dreamer; in fact, from a boy, my sleep has

been sound and untroubled, and my only dreams were due to haggis or something of the kind. Then, as you have told me, everything in this adventure of yours was but what you might have recalled from what you had heard in the course of the preceeding twenty-four hours. I don't say it was that, but I do say it is a possibility worth considering. Your third idea was that you had verily met Morag the Seal, and you dismissed this as too gross a superstition for a reasonable man to entertain. I thought so once, and now I should like to say a word or two on that; but I see it's nearly nine. Let us go and ask my wife for a cup of tea. The brougham doesn't come for you till eleven. We'll finish our talk later.'

CHAPTER VI

SHORTLY before ten o'clock we resumed our chairs, with whisky and cigars before us.

'Doctor!' I said, 'you were going to tell me something about this mysterious story of Morag the Seal. It has haunted me ever since I came into this country in a most extraordinary manner, and now you half hint that you believe it. Do tell me, to start with, am I to understand that one must believe in the supernatural—in miracles, in fact—to comprehend things in your West Highland country? For I fear my tendency all along has been rather materialistic, and I'm not sure that I could follow you.'

'A very reasonable question,' he said, 'but let us clear the ground to start off with. We must agree as to the meaning of words, for more than half the trouble in life comes from two people using the same words in wholly different meanings, and being consequently quite unable to understand each other.'

'I quite agree, but surely there is no difference as to the meaning of supernatural and of miracles.

'All the difference in the world. If by Nature

you mean the whole of God's creation, there is no such thing as the supernatural ; it would be synonymous with the non-existent or impossible. But if you take Nature to be merely that part of God's creation which we know and understand, the supernatural is a shifting term, and is continually becoming the natural as knowledge increases. No doubt the medieval Church would have burned a telephone operator as a wizard, simply because they confused the two meanings of Nature. Again, if you take Nature to mean just that part of God's creation which can be investigated by the physical senses and instruments that aid them, as microscopes and the like, then life, consciousness, thought, and all such things are all supernatural.'

'Then,' I queried, 'what is your own view ? That we may speak from the same platform ?'

'I count Nature to be all God's creation—everything that man can by any means perceive or think about—and I hold that it follows always the same orderly course.'

'You mean, obeys "the great law," as the Buddhists would say.'

'Precisely, if by a law you mean that the same cause, if it can be exactly repeated, will invariably produce the same result. You might equally say it was the action of an intelligence which, being always right, was always consistent, and never capricious. I prefer that view myself, for a law seems to me to necessitate a lawgiver, and there we are at the same problem again. But all this is hardly to the point, is it ?'

'Well! yes, I think it is,' I replied. 'You see, this Morag appears to me to be supernatural, or a miracle, or whatever it may be called, and, therefore, if, as I quite agree, the supernatural is the impossible, then Morag is impossible, and the whole thing is just a delusion of an imaginative West Highland brain.'

'Wait a moment,' said the doctor. 'I said that I used the word Nature to mean the whole of God's creation, so far as it is, or can be, manifested to us, but I don't know all the laws of it. I am using the word law as the Buddhist uses it. How, then, can we say that a thing is above, or beyond, or contrary to the law of Nature when we don't know that law?'

'Then you don't believe in miracles; and if this Morag is a miracle, you disbelieve in her existence?'

'Pardon me, I didn't say so. If by a miracle you mean a capricious interference by an Oriental despot with the laws himself has imposed, I agree with you altogether; but I say that if the law is perfect, as it must be if it is synonymous with God, then it must provide a result for every possible circumstance, or combination of circumstances, which acts as a cause. So, then, if an entirely exceptional combination of circumstances arose, the law, if perfect, must produce an entirely exceptional result. These circumstances may possibly occur in this combination once in the world's history. The result is, therefore, unique, or, as we say, a miracle.'

'By that rule you may believe all the miracles recorded of St. Columba.'

'Why not? Some time ago I received at sea a message from another ship which I could not even see. You will say, "A marconigram; nothing wonderful in that!" True, my dear sir; but ten years ago the Hertzian waves were as unknown as the forces we now call spiritual are still. I do not know, if we accept the evidence of Columba's miracles, why he should not have had the control of natural forces, or why, if there were a man like Columba now, he should not have the control of the same forces, and do all that is recorded of Columba. Why cannot I do those miracles? Because I am not a man like Columba. Why cannot I send a marconigram now to Sir John, and say you are staying with me to-night? Because I have not got the Marconi instrument. In both cases the answer is the same, the conditions are not repeated, therefore the result does not follow.

'But what has all this to do with Morag?'

'Simply this: in all ages and in all countries there are these strange legends of people who are half animal and of animals half human, usually accompanied by great physical beauty and great cruelty. I have tried to show you that in my opinion there is no a priori reason why we should reject such stories, though I concede they should be examined very carefully; but the universal concourse of belief and of well-verified stories is not to be rashly rejected without some strong and good reason, and the admitted difficulty of proving a negative makes a sensible man very shy of asserting one. The mere fact that we do not know how it happens is no argu-

ment at all. I don't know how quinine cures ague, but I know that it does, and I act on my knowledge. But we can examine it a little more closely. If we ask, Can life be shared between two beings—say a seal and a woman ? we know nothing about life or consciousness, and we cannot say definitely anything. I have seen Charcot's work in Paris, and I know it is quite possible for one person to be conscious through the bodily senses of another, and also for one person to control the bodily movements and even the thoughts and sensations of another. Indeed, the same thing occurred in my own experience, and without any hypnotism or influence whatever. When I was a ship's doctor out in the Malay Archipelago we were attacked by pirates. I fought among the rest ; my Highland blood was up. I "saw red," as they say, and fought like a demon with the keenest enjoyment. In the scuffle I got a baddish wound in the foot, and was wholly unconscious of it till afterwards. I described the wound to a young cousin of mine who was highly sensitive, and he felt acute pain in the same place, and on examination I found that he had actually got a redness in his foot exactly where my wound was, and it did really develop into a little sore. He felt, in fact, the pain which I had not felt. Now, you observe, this takes us some distance towards believing that the same life may inform two bodies, and shift from one to the other. Charcot's experiments take one rather farther. I would not, therefore, rashly reject the theory that there may be two bodies informed by the same life, though I

grant that this looks the most unlikely of all the possible theories, and would require the support of a very strong body of evidence. We do not, however, necessarily need this, for there is really no proof of the materiality of the appearances of Morag. I remember well, when I was in the East, I was very ill from some fever or dysentery or something, and was attended by a native doctor; there was no other. Once, at the very height of the disease, all my native servants had gone out. Lazy beggars! they always will if you are ill. I was alone, and thought I was going to die, and didn't really care much if I did. At this moment the native doctor came in, and said, "I want you to take a strong and quick stimulant—say half a bottle of good champagne; you will be well now in three days." I was surprised in a way, for the doctor was a Mohammedan and had kept me on a strictly teetotal regimen up to that. However, the result was attained. I took the champagne, slept for two days on end, and woke refreshed and nearly well, only to hear that my doctor had been away for four days, and could not possibly have come near me. Who or what was it I had seen who looked so like the doctor, and who gave me such good advice, and prognosticated my recovery almost exactly as to date? I never doubted his materiality till I woke after my two days' sleep. He had, in fact, so he told me, let his mind dwell strongly on my case, and was very penitent that he had not told me to take the quick stimulant, thought he could impress the idea on my mind, and tried to do so. Now, if one person has this power, another

may, and so it is conceivable that a sensitive may be made to believe that he or she has seen a man or a woman or a seal, when, in fact, no such appearance ever occurred. Mind you, I don't say that this is the solution. I don't think it is, but it is a possible one.'

The doctor seemingly did not place much store by this theory, but I own it fascinated me. I saw difficulties, however, and asked about them.

'That idea,' I said, 'seems to involve the presence in the neighbourhood of a person with sufficient hypnotic power to make a number of disconnected people fancy they saw the same thing. One has read of such things being done in the East, but rarely, if ever, in this country. Surely, if such person were to be staying in this district, his or her presence would be noticed. Again, the stories of Morag, as you have told me, persist through long periods. Such a hypnotist would not be immortal; and, again, where is the motive? Do not think I am asking these things to cast discredit on your theory—for to me it seems the most plausible I have yet heard—but rather to have them answered.'

'Don't call it my theory,' he said. 'I have already told you that I don't think it is the true solution, but it is a possible one. It is curious, however, that the appearances of Morag the Seal have been sporadic, so to speak, and one outburst was distinctly connected with the life of one of the old Camerons—an earlier Morag—who was supposed to be a witch by some of the superstitious people about.'

'She of whom I was told by the lady of the Dower House?' I exclaimed.

'The very same,' he answered; 'and mind you, how that very circumstance refutes your theory of dreaming, or at least puts a complexion upon it that I didn't think of at first. You knew nothing of this witch Morag. How could you have dreamed of her? Yet here she is, you see, in the family tree.'

He produced a roll of parchment and showed me the name.

'This is all authentic, you see,' he said. 'The entries are all verified. It is here that the records are missing. Now, you see, that it is easily conceivable that a person with hypnotic powers may impress on a sensitive brain something that he knows himself; but if the dreaming brain can reveal things that the waking consciousness was unaware of, without any other aid, we are back at our original difficulty.'

'How do you mean?'

'Why, if anything can enter the conscious brain which did not come in by the gates of the five senses, and was not put in by the conscious will of another person with hypnotic powers, it follows that there must be a conscious *ego* outside and independent of the brain, possessed of higher knowledge, and able to impart it to the physical brain. If so, how can you limit the power of such an *ego*? Why should it not take various shapes, and appear in various places? But we must pass from that, for we have not yet exhausted the possibilities of the known.'

'Then, what do you make of it?'

'Morag the witch was supposed in the neighbourhood to be the same as Morag the Seal, and from the documents I fancy she acquired a great influence over the simple country people, kept up by a sort of terror of her fancied occult powers, and probably she took every means to foster this, and if she were possessed of hypnotic powers, as seems likely (it was just at the time of Mesmer), she would most likely use them for the same purpose. This would account for that group of appearances of Morag the Seal, but I admit there are many other recorded groups of appearances which cannot be accounted for in this way.'

'Doctor,' I said, 'you are a wonderful man. Is there any subject you don't know?'

'Most subjects,' he replied; 'in fact, I am merely a man with a profession, and one hobby. My profession of medicine naturally includes psychology. No doctor now is worthy of the name who has not studied psychotherapeutics to some extent. My hobby is the history of my district, its county and family history, and its folk-lore. Where my profession and my hobby run together, as in this present case, I may be able to say something a little more interesting than perhaps the majority of men, for it is a rare combination. But now I hear the brougham coming for you. Good night. We must renew this talk; it has been most interesting. Don't forget you are to drive with me to the Dower House to-morrow, and I am to convince you that you never saw it or Miss Morag before.'

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'Thanks. Indeed, I shall not forget; I am greatly looking forward to it.'

This was no more than the truth. The glamour of the Morag whom I had seen at the old Dower House was strong upon me, but the unconventionality of our former meeting had made me certain that it could not be renewed on the same terms. And now I was to see her again, and to see her under strictly conventional and proper auspices, being taken and introduced by an old friend of the family.

So I said good night—or, rather au revoir—to the kindly doctor, and drove home full of pleasant anticipations. How, I wondered, was he going to convince me that I had not been there, when in my soul I knew I had? Perhaps the house was really different from what I had described. Well! I'm not a good hand at graphic description, and perhaps I made some mistakes; perhaps the Morag I met was quite unlike what the doctor remembered. Well! young ladies do change, and besides, if she had fallen in love with me (I felt my cheek burn at the thought), and assuming that, being entirely reared in strict seclusion, she had not been schooled in the modern art of concealing her feelings, she might well be to me quite a different person to what she was to the doctor or his worthy wife.

So my brain ran over the circumstances connected with Morag. Then, after my usual habit, I began to group the various lines of possibilities, with a view of extracting some clear conclusion. They resolved themselves into two main groups. First,

the Morag whom I had seen at the Dower House; and second, Morag the Seal, about whom I had heard so many strange stories. I was at first disposed to consider these two things as entirely disconnected; but, at all events, I had now arrived at this—there was a real Morag, the eldest daughter of the last Cameron of Ard na Righ. She had been in Devonshire six weeks ago; therefore, if she and her family were now at the Dower House, they had only lately come there. Then, however physically she may have resembled her ancestress the witch, she was plainly a very different character, from the way in which the doctor and his wife spoke of her.

Then, with regard to Morag the Seal. There seemed to be no doubt that for a long time past, perhaps for centuries, the inhabitants of this district had been quite convinced that they had seen, and in some cases known intimately, what they thought to be a supernatural appearance, answering to the ancient legend. The doctor apparently, from a scientific point of view, did not consider this so utterly impossible a thing as it certainly appeared to me; and I was bound to admit that his experience of phenomena, professionally and otherwise, in all parts of the world, was far greater than mine. Then there was the possible explanation of delusion caused by some hypnotic influence, which was quite plausible, assuming the presence of the hypnotist; but an adequate motive seemed to be wanting in most cases. Another idea occurred to myself—that these Highlanders, being naturally disposed and prepared by heredity and tradition to see some

such appearance, might have hypnotized themselves, as it were. But, again, that would not account for the information given by Morag, which was beyond the possibility of knowledge of the person to whom it was given, as in the case of the doctor's summons to attend a distant case of accident; nor did I think that autohypnotism would ever go so far as to induce suicide, or that a number of persons should by autohypnotism see the same thing about the same time, so as to fancy it real. And, again, the doctor, who was most unlikely to be hypnotized or deluded, had himself seen Morag, or some appearance he took to be her, walking with the poor boy who had drowned himself. On the whole, I was unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion on this part of the question, and being reluctant as ever to admit the supernatural, I was driven back on the idea that these appearances must be more than fancy, and must follow some law of Nature of which I was ignorant.

At this moment the brougham was passing the bridge over the stream at the mouth of the Gipsy Glen. All was quiet there, but on a knoll just beyond the bridge, clear in the moonlight, I saw Morag. She beckoned to me. I knew not for a moment what to do. To have stopped the brougham there would have attracted the old coachman's curiosity, and caused indiscreet talking; yet I must see her. I felt that she needed me, and wished to see me alone and without observation.

In a moment I thought of a plan—crude, if you will, but effective. I deliberately threw my hat out

of the window, and about fifty yards on I called to the coachman :

'Stop a minute ; I've lost my hat.'

He looked back. There it lay in the road. The knoll on which I had seen Morag was round a bend and out of sight. I was quite convinced that the old coachman would sit stolidly on his box until my return, and would not even have the curiosity to look back again ; so I ran rapidly round the bend, and saw no one. I peered round anxiously ; finally, I mounted the knoll on which I had seen her. There she stood, full in the moonlight, coming towards me with her arms extended, and the old winning, welcoming smile on her face. All my doubts and suspicions vanished in a second. I was the same man as I had been when we sat together in the old Dower House—a man that the more ordinary and usual side of me did not recognize for myself at all—a lover, an enthusiast, surprised at nothing, taking the most extraordinary things for granted. Here, for example, I seemed to think it quite an ordinary thing that this young lady whom I had seen in the shelter of a refined library, and whose conduct, if unconventional for a first acquaintance, was marked with a winning graciousness and the characteristics of high culture and noble race, should be waiting here alone by the roadside at half-past eleven at night in a lonely spot, the only human habitation near being the house of him whom she regarded as the cruel enemy of her family.

In sober, waking earnest this was singular enough,

but then it did not appear so to me, and as a proof of this I never even questioned her as to her appearance at that time and place. For a second I held her strained to my heart; then she said:

'Don't stay a moment. I've come to warn you. You are in great danger. If you find out too much about the Bradley brothers, one or other of them will kill you. They are using you, not to discover the truth, but to cover a lie. Trust the doctor. Good-bye, dear! I mustn't stay. Don't forget me. We shall soon meet again. Now go.'

Bewildered, I left her. When I reached the road, I looked round to wave a farewell. The knoll was empty, not a creature in sight. I picked up my hat, and ran back to the brougham, jumped in, slammed the door, and called out to the coachman:

'All right. Thank you for stopping.'

Then the idea flashed into my brain, this peculiarly unconventional young lady is probably friends with the gipsies. She has come out here, perhaps is staying, with the gipsies. It would not be much more eccentric than other things, after all. Perhaps she is a gipsy herself. With the suddenness of a flash this idea burst upon me.

'By Jupiter, that's it!' I exclaimed aloud, slapping my leg in the excitement of the discovery; 'that's it! Why didn't I think of that before? Of course, that explains everything. There are no Camerons at the Dower House. This gipsy girl just got in and played the gracious hostess. By George! how well she did it, too! Or, let me see—perhaps more likely a gipsy-mother has been doing caretaker. She would

keep out of sight, of course, and let her daughter have a free hand to play. The daughter would try to mystify me. Perhaps '—here vanity cropped up again—' the daughter may have fallen in love with me. Anyhow, she has been playing Morag the Seal for the benefit of these simple peasants, and no doubt reaped a fine harvest out of it. Morag the Seal has been known here for generations. Well, these gipsies have been here for generations. Doubtless a succession of gipsy girls have played the part; it has become traditional among them. How absurdly plain, and how simple! I wonder if the doctor knows it? At any rate, this is clearly his great surprise. He is going to take me to the Dower House to show me that the Camerons are not there, and so convince me that I never was there. If he doesn't know about the gipsies, I can turn the tables on him finely, and give him an explanation that will knock all his fine metaphysical arguments to flinders.'

I was in great feather, and vastly well pleased with myself as the brougham drew up at the front door, and a sleepy footman let me in, with the almost needless message that Sir John had not waited up, but was gone to bed.

I took my candle and retired also, curiously elated with my discovery, and with the natural elation at solving a mystery there was blended a certain satisfaction on another ground. I had spoken to myself of Morag as unconventional and other epithets rather connoting a certain disapproval, a suggestion of conduct not quite worthy her race, something I

was sorry for ; but in spite of this critical judgment, I knew that the memory of her clinging arms round my neck, of her kisses on my lips, was very sweet. I might criticize or reprobate as much as I pleased, but in my soul I knew I was a hypocrite, and that I just longed for Morag again ; and now that I knew she was no high-born dame, but just a gipsy girl, everything was clear, and her behaviour absolutely natural. A merry girl full of mischief and fun, nothing in this world could be more charming. She played jokes on the fishermen and gillies. Well! what harm ? I should like to play them with her, if she would let me. For the moment I forgot the grim tragedy of the boy found dead on the shore.

I slept well that night. If the queer shadow pantomime repeated itself on the wall opposite my room, I knew nothing of it. They might have buried Morag the Seal a dozen times over for aught that I knew about it, but I dreamed deliciously of Morag the gipsy girl, and woke with an odd feeling of incongruity that I, the staid sober lawyer, who inscribed ' International Jurisconsult ' (the title was my own invention) after his name in the law-list, was growing as keen over a love affair as a boy fresh from Oxford. Well! no matter; the feeling was a mighty pleasant one, and served to remind me that, notwithstanding a hard and not altogether unsuccessful career, I had not wholly left my youth behind me.

I went down to breakfast in great good humour, and found my host with an open note from Dr. MacCulloch in his hand.

'The doctor tells me he is going to carry you off on his rounds this morning,' he said. 'He hopes that, between you, you may light on some trace of our missing records. I earnestly trust you may, but since poor Allan Kerr's disappearance I have begun to lose hope. I had set so much store by the chance of his knowledge giving us all we needed, and now he's gone, poor chap! and my reward has produced no effect as yet. However, I won't despair. I want to ask a favour of you, Mr. Kingsburgh. Please tell me if it is unprofessional, or wrong in any way.'

'I am sure you could ask nothing that would be wrong, Sir John,' I said, 'and I think I may safely promise to do my utmost to fulfil any wish of yours.'

'I want you,' he said, 'to write a preliminary opinion for me of my title so far as you have been able to investigate it at present. You do think it is pretty good, don't you?'

'Short of being technically indefeasible, I think it's as good a title as a man need wish to have,' I replied; 'and the evidence that we want I think should be in our hands in a very short time, and then I shall have no further excuse for trespassing on your kind hospitality.'

'Oh, but indeed I hope I may have the pleasure of your company for much longer than that. The long vacation is coming near, isn't it? You must stay and shoot a deer or two in the forest. But there's the doctor. Well, good-bye for the present. You'll write that preliminary opinion this afternoon, won't you?'

'I will, indeed. Good-bye just now.'

I climbed into the doctor's trap, and we drove off at a merry pace along the road I had cycled on my first day.

'Well, have you made your choice among the various theories that we discussed last night?' he said, as soon as his excellent horse had settled into his trot again.

'I confess,' I said, 'that I want to find a rational and material explanation for everything if I can, and I believe this will bear it.'

'Quite right,' he answered—'quite right; so do all of us, and rightly, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the natural and material explanation is the true one. Only remember that when the natural explanation proves wholly impossible, it may be just as credulous or even more so to disbelieve than to believe. I say more so, because a negative is notoriously difficult of proof; therefore, to believe a negative—that is, to believe something extremely difficult of proof—is to exhibit greater credulity than is shown by the man who believes an affirmative on slight evidence. The opposite of belief is not disbelief, but philosophic doubt.'

We were now turning into the woods.

'I want you to show me, if you can remember,' said my companion, 'exactly where you rested under the tree.'

I had no difficulty about this.

'Here it was,' I said.

'Yes,' said the doctor, jumping down, 'and now where was the path you went along?'

I rubbed my eyes, and looked all round. Not a vestige of a path to be seen.

'I fancy I must be mistaken,' I said. 'It can't have been this tree, after all.'

'I think it was,' said the doctor drily. 'There's been neither rain nor wind since you were here, and see, here is the mark where you leaned your bicycle against the tree, and here, if I mistake not, is something belonging to your bike.'

He held out a nut unmistakably mine, for the two colours of that make are rare anywhere, and had not penetrated into the Highlands at the time of my stay there. I had missed that nut on my return, and replaced it—it was not an important one—and thought no more about it.

'I hoped you would have guided me along that path,' said the doctor, 'but it seems to have been quite obliterated by undergrowth. Nevertheless, it must have existed, for it is marked on the map, and, indeed, I remember it well. When I used to attend this district, I often took a short cut this way to the Dower House. But it seems now that you can have hardly come this way the day before yesterday. Never mind, we will drive round another way.'

'O-ho,' thought I, 'so there's another way, is there? Then that is how provisions get in. Not that I suppose the gipsy caretaker has much dealings with local tradesmen; poaching in the woods more likely.'

We got back into the trap again, from which we had alighted to look for the path, and drove along

the woodland road. After a quarter of a mile or so we turned round to the left along a road that was little more than a cart-track, and after a few hundred yards became only a clear space between the trees. A few laurel and rhododendron bushes, unkempt and shaggy, showed that it had once been the approach to a house. We turned abruptly round a corner among some tall ornamental trees, and there before us rose a few blackened walls of what had once been a dwelling house, now standing in an open field.

'The old Dower House!' said the doctor. 'Burnt to the ground three years ago, and never rebuilt.'

CHAPTER VII

I STARED in amazement. There was clearly no doubt whatsoever about it—this was the house I had been to. I began by degrees to recognize landmarks. That tall deodar I well remembered to have seen from the window as I talked with Morag, and beyond it could be traced the outlines of the hedge and even the gap where the wicket-gate had stood. Here, then, must have been the French window where we had entered only the day before yesterday; and here the very place where the couch had stood. Good heavens! A heap of blackened and rotten beams marked the spot now. Was this a bad dream, or what was it?

I stood within the ruined walls. The doctor, standing outside, was regarding me with a curious air, rather as of one watching an interesting case, and hardly able to make up his mind about it.

The ruins were open to the sky; not a beam was left to cross the expanse of pure blue above us. A scrap of the partition wall still remained. I felt for the moment like one gazing on the dead form of his only love, whom he hoped to meet in the fresh glow of youth and beauty. I had come expecting

to be welcomed to the Dower House by Morag, or the gipsy-girl who stood for Morag, or, at any rate, to renew the experiences which had been at once so novel and so sweet. I was confronted by this bare lifeless skeleton of a house.

Was that a low laugh in the corner, or was it only a whisper of the wind? Was that a shadow, or was it the form of Morag there in the corner? Bah! my imagination is playing wild tricks. This won't do. I stepped out of the house, and rejoined the doctor.

'Well,' he said, 'what do you think now? Were you ever here?'

'That I can't say. This blackened ruin I never saw; yet it is equally certain that I have seen and known the room I told you of. I remember perfectly all the details of which any trace is left.'

'Your consciousness must have slipped back for three years. This is really very interesting. Charcot mentioned something of the kind in one of his lectures, where one of his sensitives held a stone, and described the building it was taken from, which had been pulled down. I thought at the time that there must have been some trick about it, and that she had really seen the building, and exercised an unconscious memory. I never personally came across a case; but yours must be genuine, for you could never have seen the Dower House materially, when it was entire. That is what they call psychometry. I have rather doubted it before. But the difficulty of Morag still remains.'

I now mentioned my theory of the gipsy-girl, only

as an exploded notion, contradicted by obvious facts.

'Stop a moment,' said he. 'We are only theorizing, and we must take every possible clue. We spoke last night of hypnotism. Say that your gipsy girl is a hypnotist; say she met you in the wood.'

'I met no one in the wood.'

'So you think; but say for the sake of argument that you did meet her, that you were fascinated by her looks—perhaps by a physical likeness to that pastel picture you told me of. She got an influence over you, and succeeded in hypnotizing you. The first thing she would order you would be to forget where you met her. I have often seen Van Eeden do that. Then she would suggest the Dower House: a vivid spoken description would make you see it—all the rest would follow. She would lead you back to your bicycle, and order you to wake in five minutes, after which she would have plenty of time to get away. Faith! I believe we are on the track of the solution now. Well, jump in. I must hurry. I have two or three cases to visit on this side of the loch, then I will put you down at Airton House again in time for lunch, and get myself a fresh horse for my afternoon work.'

So we drove on. There was little of interest in the remainder of the drive, which was just an ordinary country doctor's round, except the last visit, which was to an old woman suffering from chronic rheumatism. 'This old lady,' said the doctor, as we approached a little heather-thatched

cottage on a lone hill-side, what in Scotland is called a 'but and a ben,' 'was a great friend of poor Allan Kerr, the loonie who disappeared so strangely. She may have something to say. Come in with me. I can't do anything for the poor old dame; but she likes me to change her medicines now and then—gives the old body the idea that she's not neglected, you know.'

It was an object-lesson in the self-sacrificing life of a country doctor. Here was this man of rare attainments and wide culture, driving often a long round over a barren moor, in all weathers, with no fee or reward, merely to satisfy an old peasant woman by changing the medicine that he knew could do no good, just to let her feel she was not neglected. Truly, here was something very near the Christ-life.

'Well, Mistress MacFarlane,' he said in his cheery tones, 'and how are you to-day?'

'Mighty bad, doctor! That last stuff you gave me has done me no good at all.'

'Dear, dear! I'm very sorry to hear that. Well, I'm going to give you a new prescription. I think this may do better for you.'

'Ah! thank ye, doctor dear! Ye're very kind, and it's the truth; and is this your assistant?'

'No, no; that's a friend of mine. He's interested in the wee loonie, and we hope you'll be able to tell us something about the mannie.'

'Deed, doctor! and I'm sair anxious myself about yon wee man. You'll know how regularly he used to come to see me, and whiles he brought

me a bottle of whisky. I dare say it was smuggled. The wee man was ower familiar wi' the gipsies at the glen, an' a' the country kens they're just deevils for poaching and smuggling. Sometimes it was a rabbit or a hare, and much do I suspect it came from the same source; but it's not for me to be inquiring where they came from. The mannie was real good to me; but this while past he's not been near me, and I do believe he's met wi' some foul play. And listen, doctor! whatever comes to me for saying it, I believe that Mr. William's at the bottom of it.'

'Oh! I wouldn't think that, Mistress MacFarlane. Why should you say so?'

'Well, doctor dear! it's just about a fortnight past now that I was hobbling round by the back of my cottage. I was out of sight, ye ken, just ben the woodstack, and Mr. William, he was coming down from the hill, and with him was that dandified chap—Faa Simpson they call him—the king of the gipsies he makes himself out to be, so they tell me—that Mr. William has engaged as one of his keepers or something—and Mr. William was saying, "Well, anyhow, he knows too much for me, so I'll just rely on you," and the gipsy chap, he just said one word—I think it was in his own lingo; I don't rightly know what it was—but Mr. William, he says, sharp-like, "No; I'll have none of that—no violence, mind you—just a dose of the same stuff as before. I'll send you some more of it, and Jack will take care of him." By "Jack" he was meaning Sir John, you know.'

'But surely, Mistress MacFarlane, the brothers are always quarrelling. They never speak to each other,' said the doctor.

'Aye, that's what they want folk to believe,' said the old dame; 'but MacLennan—that 'll be Mr. William's head stalker, you know; he's nephew to my man that's dead — he told me — ye see MacLennan he's always very friendly wi' me—well, he said one day when he'd been spying over the face of Ben na Chat to look for deer, he saw through his telescope Sir John and Mr. William walking together as thick as thieves. Sir John's carriage was waiting for him out of sight round a bend of the road, and no doubt they thought no one could see them. So I think they're no just such deadly enemies as folk think, maybe. But MacLennan, he warned me never to say this to any mortal soul, and I never have till this moment. Well, then, only two days ago Sir John, he was driving up this way again to the same place—and I believe he was on the same errand, and I'm sure that it was about that poor wee loonie, and I can't tell you why, doctor, but I feel just certain that that Faa Simpson rascal has put the mannie out of the way somehow, and Sir John and Mr. William have made it worth his while for some wicked purpose of their own. There now, doctor, I've told you, and I was afeared to tell anyone else, but I'm right glad I've told you. I've got it off my conscience now, and, indeed, it's been a sair load there these many days.'

'Well, Mistress MacFarlane, I'm greatly obliged

to you, and you may be sure I'll do what I can, and no one will ever know where I got my information from; but you must keep a still tongue, you know, for your own sake and every one else's.'

'Deed, doctor dear! I'm sure of that; and you know I'm not one to talk; and you'll send me some new medicine, won't you?'

'I will, indeed. Good-bye!'

Seated once more in the trap, and the horse under weigh, the doctor gave a prolonged whistle.

'By the Lord! the plot thickens,' he said at length. 'The two brothers really working together, and only pretending to quarrel. What on earth is the game?' It was very seldom, and only when bothered or excited that the doctor relapsed into slang. 'Then the loonie and the gipsy king, or chief, or whatever he is—an unmitigated blackguard in any case. I know his record fairly well, but he has the glib tongue and the handsome looks of his race, and carries away all women and many men by palaver and a smile and a glint of white teeth; a supple, good-looking scoundrel, and he knows it, and knows the market value of his looks and his tongue as well as anyone. The loonie knew too much. Well, well! I half suspected that. Mr. Kingsburgh, is Sir John's title really all right?'

'Not a ghost of a doubt of it,' I replied—'so far, at least, as I can see. It is true, of course, as you know, that some records are missing; but, after all, they are so fully alluded to in the extant records which are undoubted that their absence does not make much difference except technically. No

court in the kingdom would question a title on such slender grounds without more to go on. And then, as a fact, the title doesn't depend on the records. There are Alasdair Cameron's receipts for over fifty thousand pounds and accumulations of unpaid interest. I have all the papers of the legal process by which the estates passed to Sir John's father, and that, in case of any question, would be his title, with all the sanction of the courts behind it, however much he may sentimentally prefer to rest on the other.'

'I see, I see! Of course, that's perfectly clear. I just thought from his anxiety about his title that it must have been that which the loonie knew too much of. Evidently it was something else. Well, at any rate, we have got some points clear now. You didn't see the Dower House because there isn't one standing any more, and of all probable theories of your fancy that you did, perhaps the most likely is that you were hypnotized by a gipsy-girl. If she had the knowledge that you thought you got from Miss Morag, that would account for all the facts. Of course, that doesn't prove that the theory is correct, but it does make it one of the working probabilities. Then we have some evidence—not very good, but some—that there is some sort of collusion between the Bradley brothers, and that Faa Simpson the gipsy is somehow or other mixed up in it, and a possibility that the loonie was put out of the way among the precious trio. If old Mrs. MacFarlane heard rightly, it may go so far as to show that the little man was drugged and

taken somewhere into Sir John's custody with William's connivance; also that it was not the first time that drugs had been used by the same person with the same object. I confess this is all rather doubtful evidence; still, I recall that in my practice during the last ten years I have met with some curious cases that looked to me like the action of some obscure drug—probably a powerful soporific—but the unlikelihood of such a thing in this remote district rather put me off. I shall look up my case-book now with renewed interest. Well, here are a budget of fresh facts and theories that will need thinking over, and, meanwhile, here we are at the turn to Airton House. I'll drop you here and go home for a fresh horse. Many thanks for your company thus far. Good-bye!'

I walked up to the house just as the gong was sounding for lunch. I found Sir John in great good humour.

'I have just had the first answer to my offer of a reward for poor Allan Kerr,' he said. 'A man writes to me from Glasgow saying that the little man went there to stay with his brother, that his brother had come up here to fetch him, and while there he had had some sort of a stroke, but was getting better. So we may yet hope to have his evidence. I would gladly give more than the fifty pounds reward for this.'

He spoke most straightforwardly, and handed me the letter, which was certainly quite frank and simple; yet, somehow, I distrusted the whole story. There was no address given at which the loonie

could be seen, but otherwise there was overmuch accounted for—the writer seemed to be at pains to meet every objection that could be brought, and to account completely for everything that was mysterious in the little man's disappearance, and the story of the stroke looked to me like an attempt beforehand to account for any appearance of the effect of the drug when he was found again, if he ever was.

However, I dismissed these speculations, and after lunch I applied myself diligently to the task Sir John had asked me to undertake—namely, the preparing of a draft opinion on his case so far as the information then at my command would suffice. I was rather surprised at the ease with which my notes fell into formal shape, and how distinctly good a case was made out. Indeed, it seemed as I went on that really the missing records and the hiatuses in Sir John's father's banking account were of very small moment. My opinion was prefaced by a summary of the evidence, not only of the legal process whereby the late Sir John Bradley had become possessed of the lands, but also of his connexion with the old Cameron family, and his more than probable position as the rightful heir. All seemed most clear and luminous, and the opinion that followed this summary, that the Bradley family had as nearly as possible a perfect title to the lands of Ard na Righ, was the only logical conclusion, and was inevitable. So much, in fact, was this the case that I forgot for the moment that it was only a draft opinion that I was writing, and signed and

dated it as though it were to go out to my solicitors the same afternoon.

Sir John had been strolling in the garden, nipping withered flowers from the shrubs, and pausing now and then to admire the view down the arm of the sea out to the open western waves. He came in just as I finished my opinion. He sat down, lighted a cigarette, and perused it in silence. I saw a strange smile that looked rather like one of unholy triumph as he came to the end; yet it was not unnatural that he should feel some elation in getting an opinion absolutely confirming what he had so much set his heart on.

'With your permission, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said, 'I will keep this till to-morrow. It is most interesting.'

I was delighted that he should. In fact, I was feeling a sort of conscious glow of satisfaction over my work, unusual with me, and for which I could not, and cannot now, fully account. It was something akin to the satisfaction of a chess-player who has solved a problem in a peculiarly neat way. I had done nothing clever, but the facts had marshalled themselves neatly, that was all; but it was many days, as a fact, before I saw that opinion again.

There is but little to record of the rest of that day, or of several days that succeeded it. Sir John furnished me with masses of documents—notes, old diaries, pedigrees, letters, and the like, all bearing on his title—and these I was actively engaged in sorting and arranging. All were more or less con-

firmatory of what I had already investigated. Besides these were his own notes of what he expected to get from old Allan Kerr; and therewith some scraps that he had actually got which were certainly of very great value, and pointed to the very strong probability that the old man knew a great deal more than he had yet divulged, and also had access to sources of information which would carry us to the end of our search. The old man had been a clerk or something of the kind to a firm of local lawyers who for generations had acted for the Camerons, and acted for them in the legal proceedings that gave the estates to the elder Sir John, but I gathered there had been some rather grave dissatisfaction with the way they had conducted the business. The senior partner had committed suicide after the decree; the junior partner, then a man of forty or so, had given up his business and gone abroad suddenly, leaving the office and the papers, etc., in the charge of the two or three clerks, with vague messages that he was coming back in a week or two to sort up and dispose of everything; and with a month's wages each in advance, naturally enough, the clerks had a jolly idle time for the month. Then, as their master did not return, they took themselves off, and a distant relative of the junior partner came down and cleared out and sold everything of any value. An expert went through the boxes and reported that all that was left was practically waste paper—drafts, old accounts, discharged mortgages, and such-like—which in any well-regulated office would

have been burnt long ago. Dr. MacCulloch had rescued a few papers as having some antiquarian interest, the rest were destroyed. But it seemed there were not wanting those who thought that the junior clerk, Allan Kerr, knew more about the office papers than he chose to tell, and that he was, in fact, far more knowing than any junior clerk had any right to be.

The firm had been far from prosperous, and folk said at first that the senior partner's suicide and the junior's sudden disappearance meant financial embarrassment, but rumour had it that the junior partner spent money freely in foreign lands, but rarely remained long at the same address.

Allan Kerr retired to a little lonely cottage, and gradually developed a marked eccentricity and an increasing love of solitude, which resulted in his name of 'the loonie.'

There seemed some reason to suppose that the loonie had carried off from the office many papers of value, and that this, and not the junior partner's care, was, in fact, the reason why nothing was found; but, if this were so, he had never divulged the fact, nor had anyone ever seen any papers whatsoever in his possession, but his knowledge, whenever he could be persuaded to impart it, was extraordinary.

For the rest he seemed to have been a universal favourite, and his eccentricity, or madness, appeared to have been rather assumed than actual, probably for the sake of avoiding impertinent curiosity.

All this time I never saw Morag to speak to,

though once or twice I caught a glimpse of her in the Gipsy Glen, sometimes standing on a projecting point of rock balanced at a giddy eminence over the stream, sometimes sitting by the margin a little distance up from the bridge. When I saw her thus I always longed to follow her and get speech of her somehow. There were so many things I wanted explanations on, but invariably she put a finger on her lip and motioned me away. I gathered that somehow the gipsy tribe did not look on our friendship with any favouring eyes, and perhaps any injudicious move on my part might have serious consequences for her, for I well knew of the fierce and jealous disposition of these wild nomads. At the same time I was sure that Morag was really fond of me, and wanted to keep me warned of some danger that she knew of that threatened me. My conviction also deepened that I was right, and that Morag the gipsy-girl had exercised some hypnotic influence over me, and had made me fancy I saw the old Dower House.

Sir John's correspondent in Glasgow also wrote several letters giving detailed accounts of Allan Kerr's illness, and gradual recovery. He was well enough at the time of the last letter to send a message to the effect that he had sought for the missing records, and had procured them from an acquaintance in Glasgow, and would bring them with him on his return, which might be expected in a week or so—as soon, in fact, as the doctor would allow him to move. I was surprised, after what I had heard, at the almost affectionate interest that

Sir John evinced in the little man, and could only conclude that he had been maligned or misunderstood, for certainly no one could be more solicitous or take more extraordinary pains to find him and to help him. The public offer of a high reward and the response to it was convincing proof of the genuineness of his desire to do all that could be done; and if Mrs. MacFarlane's story were true, and there were any foul play, then it was William Bradley, and not Sir John. The unknown William was always a puzzle, from whom the unexpected might be looked for.

So the days passed until one afternoon, as I was strolling slowly just before lunch along the road by the stables, Donald came out, and first looking apprehensively round, beckoned me in. I followed him to a tiny room out of the harness-room, and here, after examining all round, and peering through the window and door to be sure there were no listeners, he seated himself on the table, giving me the sole chair, and said:

'Sir! there's foul play!'

'Foul play! What on earth do you mean, Donald?'

'About the wee loonie, sir! The laird's been hearing from Glasgow about the mannie, hasn't he?'

'Yes, he has; but what then? Have you heard from Glasgow, too?'

'Devil a bit, sir! No need to go as far as to Glasgow to hear of the poor wee mannie.'

'Why, Donald, what do you mean?'

'Just this, sir! The wee loonie never left this district at all. He's been caught and shut up here.'

'Here! Why, it's impossible!'

'Impossible or no, sir! it's a fact. The loonie's just shut up in yon old castle. I tell you how I know: I was climbing up the ivy after a wood-pigeon's nest, and I thought I heard a moan, and I peeped through a window hole, and there, lying on a sort of bed—I suppose it was, but it looked more like a bier to me—was the loonie. Devil a mistake about him—lying just still and white as if he were dead; but he wasn't dead, and there watching him was that gipsy rubbidge—the king, or chief, or what nonsensical play-acting thing they call him. You bet I shinned down faster than I got up, and the gipsy never saw me. But, sir, all those letters from Glasgow are just a blind, or if they're not that, then they are from a man that's sore mistaken.'

'Well, Donald, it's a queer story. But what can one do?'

'That's what I want you to say, sir! I'm game to do whatever you bid, but it's not for me to think. Only, if I might be so bold as to suggest, sir! you would ask the doctor to help, and I don't think I would say anything to Sir John in the meantime.'

My first impulse had been to go straight to Sir John with the story, so impressed was I with the transparent and obvious honesty of his concern for the loonie, and his desire for tidings of him, but as

I walked back to lunch I saw the strong common sense of Donald's advice, and determined to act upon it. It required some effort to say nothing when Sir John produced and handed to me to read another letter from his Glasgow correspondent, this time giving, as if from the loonie, a list of the records which he professed to have recovered. I recognized at once that these were the very documents we were in search of, and properly described. The loonie might have known what was missing, and how to describe them in technically correct terms, from his office experience and his knowledge of the Camerons' affairs; but no one else was likely to know, assuming the loonie was really lying insensible in the old castle. I almost began to think Donald's discovery must be a figment of his own brain, but, then, it keyed in so curiously with what Mrs. MacFarlane had said that it bore the impress of truth on this account.

I waylaid the doctor on his return from his rounds and laid the whole strange story before him. He listened with patience to the end; then he strode up and down in the deepest thought, his hand often passing restlessly over his forehead. 'What you tell me,' he said, "fits in most curiously with something I have met with. Wait a minute; let me get some old case-books.'

He dived into some dim recesses of his consulting-room and brought out some ancient and dusty little books, which he turned rapidly over, murmuring to himself as he did so.

'Yes, yes! That's odd—Jessie Maclean—then

Rory Stewart. Poor Rory!—then—ah! here's another. All the symptoms much the same.' The doctor was most perturbed. 'Really, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said at last, 'it's a most singular thing. There have been quite a little crop of mysterious illnesses in this district during the last ten years. They mostly ended in death, and no one could exactly fathom the cause. I had a big specialist from Glasgow to see one or two of them, and he said it was the same sort of disease as the sleeping sickness, and something like the tsetse fly must have come over with some of the ships or drifted over with the Gulf Stream. There was a learned paper about it in the Medical Society's Transactions. Anyhow, they just slept their lives away, and the curious thing, that never struck me till this moment, was that every one of those that I have noted here was engaged in some work for Sir John, and was on the point of giving him full information about his title. Put that along with what Mrs. MacFarlane said about Kerr's knowing too much. Dear me! one does not like these suspicions. But, anyhow, if Donald is right, and the loonie is really shut up in the old castle, we must get him out. We can't do anything to-day now. We must go cautiously, anyhow, for it's an awkward thing to invade a man's house on the suspicion that he has a prisoner shut up there, especially a man of Sir John's temper. Well, I'll see to-morrow morning what can best be done, and I shall rely on your help, Mr. Kingsburgh, and on your legal knowledge to keep us right in case of trouble.'

There was no more to be said or done then, and I felt that the affair was in strong and competent hands, so I went back to dinner with a much calmer mind, and passed the evening over deeds and pedigrees, as usual. There was still a great mass waiting to be sorted and arranged, but very little of novelty or practical use in any of them.

Next morning at breakfast, to my intense surprise, Sir John said, almost as soon as we sat down:

'Mr. Kingsburgh, I have received strange and disquieting news. It seems that we have been deceived, and that poor Allan Kerr never left this country at all. He was, as I am now given to understand, kidnapped by some of those gipsies in the glen below the house, and actually shut up in my old castle. It is almost incredible insolence, and what the motive can be I cannot think, unless it is some mad scheme of my brother's. Unfortunately, and utterly against my advice, he took one of the worst rascals of them as his keeper. I went out of my way and broke the silence of years to meet my brother and entreat him not to have anything to do with Faa Simpson, who calls himself the king of the gipsies. But my poor brother only gave me abuse for my pains, and now I hear that my lad Donald actually saw that poor little man shut up in a room in the castle, with the gipsy keeping guard. Since then I hear the gipsy has bolted, but the wee loonie is still there. It baffles me, Mr. Kingsburgh, and come of it what may, I shall be blamed. The silly stories about

my supposed animosity to the poor creature are sure to be raked up, and the fact of his being found shut up in my house, though, as you know, I never go there, will be used against me. Well, I rely on your help and on the doctor's. I have sent for him, for I felt it was not a job that unprofessional men should tackle without a doctor on the spot, and as soon as ever he comes we will search the castle and set him free, wherever he is; and if he has really had a stroke or anything the doctor will do all that human skill can do for him. Ah! here comes the doctor.'

While he was speaking, my ideas concerning him underwent a total reversal. He was so transparently honest, and all that he said was so obvious and convincing. After all, why in the world should he have kidnapped and imprisoned a man whose information was so valuable to him? and, above all, in his own house? Risk was great; motive entirely lacking. What motive the mysterious Mr. William may have had I did not know, and it was he to whom Mrs. MacFarlane's story pointed, and he who was in close association with the gipsies.

The doctor hurried up. He had not waited for his trap, but started as soon as he got Sir John's note.

'So you've found the lost loonie, Sir John,' he said.

'Well, not precisely found him, but I've good reason to think I know where he is.'

'Same thing, same thing!' replied the doctor.

'In the castle, you tell me. Well, let's go at once and get him out. I've brought simple restoratives in case of accident. Do you think he has been drugged?' he said with a sharp, inquiring glance at Sir John.

'Really, I can't tell what to think; it's all so mysterious. But, come now, let us get the poor chap out as quickly as we can. There will be time enough to talk afterwards.'

Sir John took the great heavy bunch of keys, and we went round to the castle door.

'I can't think how in the world they got in, or got him in,' he said. 'It couldn't have been this way, and there's no other, unless they climbed through a window, and that looks unlikely, with a helpless man to carry.'

We retraced the way that Sir John had brought me on my former visit to the castle, and reaching the dark hole, he relighted the lantern, which had certainly been trimmed and cleaned since we were here before; we gained the hollow shell of the old turret, but we did not go through the door leading into the ruinous part of the back buildings. On the right-hand side of this was a small, low-browed door, which I had not noticed. This Sir John now unlocked, and disclosed a dark, steep, winding stair.

'This,' he said, 'leads to the window, so far as I can judge that is to say, where Donald saw him.' He led the way. The doctor followed, and I came last. At length we gained a small landing, where there was a gleam of light. Sir John pushed open

a door, and we saw a vaulted, stone-floored room, in the centre of which, on trestles, was something between a carrying bier and the hand-barrow on which builders carry bricks, mortar, and the like, and lying on this a small, shrunken figure of a man wrapped up in rugs. In an instant the doctor was on his knees beside the form that lay so still and death-like before us.

'Trance or coma,' he said at length. 'Very odd. Precisely the same symptoms. Stop a minute, though. Ah! there's something that might be a clue. Come on, bear a hand, and get him out of this.'

'Is he alive?' asked Sir John anxiously.

'Yes,' replied the doctor, 'he's alive, but how long he'll be so I can't say. I've seen cases like this before, and not one ever recovered.'

Amongst us we managed to lift the rude litter carefully, and, though with considerable difficulty, we contrived to negotiate the winding stairs down into the tower and along the passage to the ladder leading to the upper air. This was a serious obstacle, but the doctor and I between us managed to carry the insensible, helpless form up the ladder steps, and lay him down on the floor of the passage, while we fetched up the litter, and so we got him out into the open air and sunshine. He looked positively ghastly and death-like.

'Dr. MacCulloch!' said Sir John, 'do everything you possibly can for him—get any specialists you like. It is of the utmost importance to me, apart from humanity, and I must get to the bottom of

this amazing outrage. A hundred pounds over and above all fees if you can make him speak coherently.'

The doctor looked more stern than I had ever seen him.

'Sir John Bradley,' he said, 'I need no bribe to do my duty.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE picture stamped itself vividly on my brain, and remains there yet, almost as fresh as on that sunny afternoon—the three of us grouped round the prostrate figure lying on the rude bier, evidently a home-made arrangement, on the drive in front of the old ivy-clad castle wall. The doctor knelt by the head of his patient, making the most careful observations of the eyes, the pulse, the lips.

'This is most extraordinary,' he said, after a while—'most extraordinary. If it is what I fancy, it is almost hopeless; yet I don't quite know.'

'What do you think, doctor? Is there anything possible that we can do?' said Sir John.

'Nothing, nothing! No; as for what I think, I can say nothing at present; it is too bizarre, too absolutely incredible and unprovable. No; I must have him under constant observation in my own house. I may succeed, but I guarantee nothing.'

'Meanwhile,' I said, my lawyer instincts turning naturally to the legal aspects of the case, 'it seems to me that we are neglecting a very important point. How did this unfortunate man come to be where we found him? There must be some foul

play somewhere, and as we are the people who found him, we shall be held responsible for giving an account of ourselves to the authorities.'

'Quite right, Mr. Kingsburgh, and very properly remembered. I was getting so interested in the doctor's diagnosis, and in my own earnest desire that the poor little man should be enabled to speak, and to tell us his own story, that I was in danger of forgetting that most essential duty. Of course, we must let the Fiscal know at once.'

'No need to take any trouble about that, Sir John,' said the doctor. 'As it chances, I think we shall find the Fiscal at my house about now. I am expecting a call from him to-day.'

I saw by Sir John's face that he was on the point of asking what on earth the Fiscal was doing at the doctor's house so opportunely, and that he refrained with difficulty. I, too, was a little surprised. The doctor took from his pocket-case a tiny hypodermic syringe, of a shape and pattern new to me, though I had seen many; and filling it from a little phial, made a subcutaneous injection high up in the nape of the neck. Then, turning up the lid of the right eye, he watched it most carefully for some moments. Then he said:

'Most curious! This seems to confirm my idea, yet it is too absurdly impossible. Well,' he continued, turning to us, 'there is just a squeak—a very narrow one, but still a squeak; by all the rules of medicine he ought to die, or if by any miracle he does not, he ought certainly to be a hopeless idiot so long as he lives; there is just a chance he may

disappoint all our theories, and do neither the one nor the other.'

'Pray Heaven, you may be right,' said Sir John. 'Now, doctor, what do you propose to do? My house and all it contains are of course at your service; we will give this poor fellow the best of nursing.'

'I am sure of it, Sir John! still, you will pardon me, I know, but in case of any inquiry I must be the principal medical witness; I am responsible for this poor man's life, and the Crown will hold me so. Under the circumstances, for my own sake as well as his, I must take him away to my own house, and I will ask you gentlemen to come with me; if the Fiscal is there, he can take your precognitions at once; I think he will be there somehow. All I will ask you for, Sir John, at the present moment, is a couple of strong men to carry him down to my place.'

Sir John blew a whistle that was always tied on his watch-chain, and immediately the stalker and the keeper came out of the house, with almost suspicious promptitude.

'I want two more,' Sir John called to them; 'bring two gardeners.'

Two gardeners were accordingly impressed, and the quartette came up to us.

'This poor man,' said the doctor, 'has fallen in a fit by the roadside; I want him carried round to my house.'

They put their shoulders beneath the four corners of the rude bier, and I startled with a shock of weird horror: there before me was precisely the scene of the shadow pantomime on the wall opposite

to my window. At the moment I did not think how inevitably four men carrying a fifth on a stretcher must reproduce that scene.

So that procession, strangely like a funeral, passed along the avenue to the lodge gates, out into the road, and along to the doctor's house, Sir John, Dr. MacCulloch, and I following like mourners. As we went through the lodge gates Sir John stepped forward to speak to the stalker, and the doctor took occasion to say softly to me :

'Immediately after I had seen you yesterday, Mr. Kingsburgh, I sent my man off as fast as he could ride to the Fiscal—that's about ten miles off—to ask him to be here this morning. I was thinking we might need him if you and I had to search the old castle on our own account. But it's better as it is ; we shall be able to lay the whole thing before him, and then he will hear what Sir John has to say, and it will be in the hands of the Crown. Anyhow, we shall have no more responsibility about the cause of the matter, or how the poor little man came to be shut up there ; and I shall be free to devote myself to bring him back to his senses, or his power of speech again if I can. There's bound to be an inquiry of some sort, but you know we do these things quietly in Scotland ; no newspaper nonsense and no publicity, unless the Crown is advised to prosecute somebody ; ever so much better.'

'Yes, doctor, I know, but tell me what is your theory of this extraordinary coma, or whatever it is. I am sure you have a theory.'

'Yes, I have a theory, but you must excuse me if

I don't mention it just now ; it is wholly improbable —some would say impossible—yet it's the only way I see of accounting for the queer series of facts we have to deal with.'

'I have no right or wish to intrude on your confidence ; you will tell me in due course if your theory pans out as you expect, but just satisfy my curiosity on one point : has it anything to do with this mysterious Morag the Seal that I have heard so much of since I came up here ?'

'Yes, and no ! I can't quite tell you that either. If my theory is sound, it might account for some of the appearances of Morag, or perhaps, indeed, the other way about : Morag might account for some of the strange sicknesses and deaths that have been about here—even for this attack of the poor loonie. This is the interpretation the country folk about here would prefer, and I've no manner of doubt it is what they will say. Well, well ! there are more mysteries of life than our scientific plummets will ever sound. The deeper our researches carry us, the more interminable seem the vistas of the unknown that open before us. The earliest of the modern school of biological investigators were deniers. They held that the end of all research and the final and triumphant demonstration of truth was at hand—that all superstition, as they used to call religion, was to be swept away, and proved fact to account for everything. Then research went on, and the chain of cause and effect was lengthened, and the end seemed farther off than before research had begun at all, and the mid-Victorian school were

agnostics; they confessed they did not know, but affirmed that no one could know anything beyond what was physically investigated and proved; religion, therefore, could not stand. I was trained in this school, and the instincts of it cling to me yet. But that great school and the giants who adorned it have passed away, and now, with the recognition of psychology, a wholly new field is open, and at present our best men are rather aimlessly wandering in it, picking flowers here and there, and the new country is not even begun to be surveyed yet. Only this can we say: the domain that was once exclusively that of the Church—or, I should rather say, of all the great revealed religions, is now open to the investigations of science; and who shall dare to say yet that the maps those religions made, and the surveys they have given us, are not absolutely accurate? That was what Von Bernstein said the other day to a class of students in Berlin, and he is the foremost thinker in Germany.'

The doctor went on talking, as was his wont, while we walked, not dogmatically, but rather meditatively, as of one thinking aloud, and without the least egoism, believing that his thought may be interesting to his companion.

Sir John fell back from his talk with the stalker, and rejoined us as we turned in at the doctor's little green gate. A portly red-headed and red-bearded man stood on the steps.

'That's the Fiscal,' whispered the doctor, and ran forward with more speed than his usual custom, hastily exchanging a few sentences in a low tone. I

guessed at once that he wished to put that official *au courant* with the changed circumstances since the communication which had brought him to the spot. Sir John and I came up almost immediately, the doctor introducing us.

'Mr. Grant, this is Mr. Kingsburgh, a distinguished London barrister staying with Sir John Bradley. Mr. Kingsburgh—Mr. Grant, our most excellent Procurator-Fiscal; you haven't got his equivalent in the South—perhaps I may say you haven't got his equal. I think you know Sir John Bradley, Mr. Grant. Now, come in—come in, gentlemen! You will excuse me, Fiscal; as medical man, I am in charge of my patient, and must take command for the moment. This way, men. My dear'—this to Mrs. MacCulloch, who beamed from the dining-room door in a somewhat mystified manner—'the little room behind the consulting-room; tell Jenny I want clean towels there—nothing else; never mind about making the bed; there is a basin and jug there, I think. Come on; bring him in here. I'll join you in five minutes.'

Mrs. MacCulloch held the dining-room door hospitably open, and we passed in while she departed in search of Jenny.

'This seems a strange matter, Sir John,' said Mr. Grant. His intonation was the rather burring drawl of the East of Scotland, but apart from this there was little in his speech to distinguish him from an Englishman, though I noticed later that when excited he lapsed into strong provincialism, and occasionally a picturesque phrase would emphasize the

conclusion drawn from his accent as to his origin, which, I gathered, like all Grants, was from the valley of the Spey. 'Yes, indeed a curious matter, but we can say nothing about it until the doctor returns; then I will ask you gentlemen to give me a few particulars, quite informally at present, so that I may have some idea of the questions I shall have to inquire into. What lovely weather! I see your crops are looking very well, Sir John. And the herring-boats are out; early for this coast, isn't it? By the way, has anything farther been heard of that queer story of the dead woman found on the shore that they sent for me about the other day? I couldn't make head or tail of it.'

'A parcel of lies,' said Sir John rather angrily; 'that ridiculous old superstition cropping up again; I've tried hard enough to kill it.'

'Well, but that doesn't altogether account for it all,' said the Fiscal. 'You see, these two men certainly said they found the body, and said it so definitely that I was sent for, and a great trouble it was. Then when I came they swore to me that they had never found anything of the kind, and I could get no evidence that they had, or that anyone else ever saw a dead body; yet I heard vague stories of burying something at dead of night, but here again I could come at no solid facts—nothing that I could proceed upon. There was no grave that one could identify, no gravedigger, no coffin ordered. Now, either no corpse was found on the shore at all, in which case Macpherson and his son lied in the first instance, when they said they had found it; or it was found

and hidden, in which case they lied when they swore to me they had not seen it; and in either case the lie seemed to be wholly without any motive. To find a dead body entails a lot of unpleasant consequences in the way of investigation; no sane person would pretend to find one. Again, to say one has found one, and afterwards deny it, entails almost worse botherations. People don't tell purposeless lies. So I can make nothing of it, even on your theory of the old superstition.'

'Is it not possible,' I said at this juncture, 'that they may have really fancied that they saw the dead body, and hastily made statements to their mates, and afterwards discovered that there was no such thing?'

'Spoken like a lawyer, Mr. Kingsburgh. That was, indeed, my own conjecture, but notice that lands us in an awkward question still, for these stories about Morag the Seal have been current in this district for over a century certainly. Can we suppose that generations of people have been deluded by the same dream, or that generations of people have conspired together to tell the same purposeless lie? But here comes the doctor; now we can attend to the matter in hand. Well, doctor?'

'I've made my patient as comfortable as is possible for the present,' said the doctor, throwing himself into his special arm-chair; 'and now I suppose you want to hear all about it, fiscal! Who will you begin with?'

'You, please,' said Mr. Grant. 'This isn't a formal inquiry, you know, but I want to get hold

of the thing generally. Now, I find a man in an extraordinary state of coma, and under your charge as a doctor, and I want to know what's the matter with him. I'll come to other questions afterwards.'

'If you wait for that, Fiscal, I'm afraid your "afterwards" will be long coming,' said the doctor. 'What's the matter with him is just what is baffling me at this moment.'

'Have you no theory? Surely you've seen something of the kind before. I have a sort of memory that I investigated a case very like this that ended fatally some time ago.'

'Quite right! So you did. You may remember, also, I had Ogden from Glasgow down to see that case. Here is his report.'

The doctor opened a bureau and took out a long envelope, which he handed to the Fiscal.

'H'm, ha! Yes, I remember now. He says it is the same thing as the sleeping sickness of Africa, and gives various ingenious guesses as to how it might have come here. Now, do *you* think this is the same class of case?'

'I do. There was a paper read before the Medical Society in Edinburgh, published in their Transactions, elaborating Ogden's ideas.'

'May I ask, do you yourself agree with those views?'

'I do not.'

'Why?'

'Well, in the first place I know the sleeping sickness in its own country—Ogden doesn't. I was a ship's doctor off the coast of Africa when it was

pretty bad, and I attended the only two white men who had it. There are marked differences in symptoms. For instance, the sleeping sickness comes on gradually. This in every instance I have known comes on in its full strength almost at once. There is also in this a curious paralysis of all motor nerves, coupled with full consciousness. I don't remember this in the sleeping sickness. There is, of course, the swelling of the glands of the neck, which is common to both. I shall, I think, be able to give you other distinctions in a few days when I have studied it more carefully.'

'What do you deduce from the distinctions you have mentioned?'

'This: the sleeping sickness comes from the bite of the tsetse fly, introducing a microbe into the blood. This microbe multiplies, and in so doing paralyses or inhibits one nerve centre after another, inducing gradually increasing drowsiness. This disease often comes on at its full strength almost at once, pointing to the conclusion that if it is any toxic substance in the blood, it does not grow and develop there, but is somehow introduced in quantity at once. I may be wrong here. Possibly the parasite developed in the tsetse fly may go through different metamorphoses; but, anyhow, my conclusion is that the poison or culture is artificially introduced, and not by the bite of the tsetse.'

'I see, I see! Now tell me, is there any known substance that would produce the same effect?'

'Nothing known to European chemists or doctors.'

I noticed the reservation, but apparently the Fiscal did not. I was familiar now with the doctor's habits of speech.

'So! Well, then, is there anything, other than drugs, that would produce the same effect?'

'Yes, it might be done by hypnotism. I knew a case of the assistant of a performing quack in Paris, who was hypnotized constantly. The man he travelled with tried some new experiment. The unlucky assistant became paralysed and comatose, and died in a few days. Nothing could rouse him. I was at the post-mortem, and we found all the nerve centres degenerated as in sleeping sickness. It was a very rare case.'

'So I should think. I'm no great believer in hypnotism and such-like. Nine-tenths of it is imposture; still, there may be one-tenth—well! I see your idea. Now tell me, who is this unfortunate man?'

All particulars about Allan Kerr, the loonie, were promptly forthcoming and duly noted in the Fiscal's book.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him. He turned the pages of his note-book rapidly backward; then, not finding what he wanted, he dived into his hand-bag and brought out another little book, which he turned over.

'Help me, doctor,' he said. 'You must have the details of these cases. There was Jessie Maclean, and then Rory Stewart, and there were others before; but I think in every case I heard some story about Morag the Seal. Is that not so?'

The doctor looked anxiously at Sir John. His face twitched, and he seemed to be mastering strong emotion. Very quietly the doctor said :

'Yes ; it was a fact, but I don't think it was relevant. Anyhow, ought we not to be getting on with the history of how this poor man was found ?'

But Sir John broke out, with anger gleaming in his eyes, and an unsteady voice, very different from his usual marvellous self-control.

'Oh, that damned old degrading superstition again, Mr. Grant ! It is a curse to the country. That poor man who lies in the next room used to talk of it ; but then, of course, he was mad, and so were those others you speak of—all mad, or they couldn't have believed such preposterous nonsense. You know it's all nonsense, don't you, Mr. Grant ?'

There was an almost pathetic note in his voice, as though he were begging the Fiscal to confirm his views, and perhaps (so I interpreted it) to free him from the tyranny of some mastering terror. The doctor flashed a glance full of meaning on the Fiscal, and it seemed the latter read it aright, for he said :

'Oh, of course no sane man believes any such rubbish now. I merely mentioned it. It has nothing to do with our inquiry—nothing at all.'

Meantime the doctor's eyes were firmly fixed on the old man's, and by degrees the purple flush in his face faded, and his natural manner returned.

'I crave your pardon,' he said, with the grave, courteous tones that seemed habitual to him. 'I have not been very well lately, and I'm afraid I am apt to get unduly excited.' The doctor con-

tinued to gaze fixedly at him, and he spoke in rather strained, unnatural tones, as though the hypnotic influence were holding some strong emotion in leash, like a wild animal cowed by superior force. 'Let us get on, gentlemen. I am ready to tell you all I know.'

'Would you mind, Fiscal, hearing what Sir John has to say now?' said the doctor. 'He is quite right. He is not very well, and I am anxious he should get home and rest as soon as possible.'

'By all means,' said the Fiscal. 'Now, Sir John, I am ready. Will you tell us in your own words all you know?'

Sir John was outwardly calm, but spoke with an evident effort, recounting the disappearance of the loonie, his offer of a reward for news of him, the response from Glasgow. He produced the letters, and laid them before the Fiscal. 'And then,' he continued, 'this morning, when I was walking out early to give some orders to my gardener, the stalker came up and told me he had heard from the boy Donald that this poor Allan Kerr was actually in the old castle that adjoins my house, as you know, and that the gipsy, Faa Simpson, was watching him. I sent off at once to inquire about the gipsy, but I was told he had bolted. This information I laid before Mr. Kingsburgh at breakfast, and at the same time I sent my gamekeeper with a note to ask the doctor to come—I felt we should need him—then the three of us went into the old castle, and there we found the little man. The others can tell you as well as I about how and where we found

him. Probably you will like to see the place yourself. If so, pray come, and let me offer you any hospitality my poor house affords.'

'Thank you, Sir John,' said Mr. Grant. 'But, pardon me, one more question. I would like to know something about that gipsy—Faa Simpson, I think you called him—indeed, I would like to know more about that gipsy gang. I have often wondered why you didn't turn them out. They are a disgrace to the county.'

'It would not be an easy matter,' said Sir John. 'Their place up the burn there is a regular fortress; indeed, I have heard that some of your own police have tried unsuccessfully to rout them out before now. Besides that, I have no cause of complaint against them. If you have, why not try again? But I think you will fail; the burn is practically inaccessible to ordinary folk, and how the gipsies go in and out is a secret of their own. So far as I know, they are quiet, well-living folk, who trouble no one. The only black sheep I know of is this Faa Simpson. He calls himself the king, but I never heard that the others acknowledged him as such. Anyhow, he is away from them, and has taken service with my poor misguided brother.'

'I expect I shall have to see Mr. William Bradley before I'm done,' said the Fiscal.

Here, apropos, as it seemed, of nothing on earth, the doctor said suddenly: 'Sir John, were you ever in Africa?'

As he spoke he watched the baronet keenly. I was rather surprised to see the latter look for the

moment strangely confused, and taken aback, as it were. It was but for a second, however; then he recovered himself.

'No,' he said—'no, I never was. My brother William spent some time on the West Coast, and made one or two expeditions into the interior. Perhaps that is what you are thinking of.'

'Probably,' said the doctor. 'It was an idle question, anyhow.'

Nevertheless, I was convinced that the question had been asked just at that time with deliberate intent. Both question and answer recalled forcibly some of the greatest effects of some of the best cross-examiners I have had the privilege of listening to. I think all present had something of the same impression, and felt that in the allusion to his brother there was some intention we could not at the moment fathom, and to which, possibly, the doctor held the key. At this moment there was a startling ring at the front-door bell, a minute or so pause, during which no one spoke, then a servant entered the room, announcing — 'Mr. William Bradley.'

CHAPTER IX

In this sudden and dramatic manner the mysterious and much-talked-of Mr. William appeared among us. At the moment of the announcement of his name I chanced to be watching Sir John rather closely, the doctor's allusion to Africa puzzling me not a little. I was expecting a flash of indignant rage, in conformity with the way in which he had spoken of his brother, and in conformity, also, with his obviously incontrollable temper under strong excitement, as shown in his fury at the mention of Morag the Seal. This flash of rage came, but it was, so to say, a minute, or, rather, a second or two, late. There was (or was I wholly mistaken ?) a flash of intelligence first, then the gleam of anger; and somehow I got the impression, without any reason for it, that the latter was a stage-effect, and one, moreover, that was not quite convincing.

'This is an unwarrantable intrusion,' he said at length. 'Pray, why do you walk in uninvited to a private meeting ?'

During the momentary pause that followed these words I turned to look at the man I had heard so much of and never seen. He was shorter than his

brother, with hair that had been dark and was now grizzled, a face slightly red and weather-beaten, as of one constantly in the open air, whereas Sir John suggested rather the recluse and scholar. Apart from this, there was the same refinement of feature, the same appearance of perfect manners, about them both, and sufficient family likeness to manifest their relationship, and sufficient difference to indicate a wide divergence of temperament, enough to render a feud by no means unlikely.

The Fiscal interposed:

'Pray, allow me, Sir John. Mr. William Bradley comes opportunely, for I should have had to go to him if he had not come to me. I am quite aware that there are differences between you two gentlemen; but may I beg, in the cause of justice, that you will be patient for a few moments, Sir John.'

'I was not intending to intrude on anyone,' said Mr. William, and his voice struck me as having a special sweetness about it. The situation was a little strained. With his usual tact, the doctor bustled forward with a cordial greeting.

'How do you do, Mr. Bradley? It is ages since I have seen you. You come most opportunely to help us in our investigations.'

'I had heard,' said the new-comer, still with that suave, gentle voice, with a slight tinge of weariness in it, 'that there was some story of Simpson, my keeper, having abducted a man and held him prisoner—a most curious story to find currency, and I need hardly say most unlikely. So I came over at

once to tell what I knew of the facts to some one of authority to receive it.'

'Most proper—most proper, Mr. Bradley,' said the Fiscal. 'I wish all would do the same; my work would be half what it is. Now, I shall be most grateful for any light you can throw on this matter.'

'I had the whole story from my keeper,' said Mr. William, 'and I must say it is, at all events, a consistent and probable one, which the other is not. It seems this poor little man, whom they called the loonie, was talking with some of the gipsy tribe; he suddenly turned faint, and lay down by the burnside, and lapsed into unconsciousness. My keeper, like most of the gipsy race, has some primitive skill in medicines, and he at once began to apply some simple remedies.'

'He should have brought him to me,' said the doctor; 'why did he not do that? He was laying himself open to grave suspicion.'

'Quite right, Dr. MacCulloch, an educated man would have known that, and, of course, that is what he should have done; but, you see, he is just an ignorant gipsy, and what he said was that there had been several cases of the same sickness in the country before that had been under your care, and every one had died. He seems to have had, for some reason or other, a great affection for this poor little man, and didn't want him to die like the rest. He says he knows the disease and the cure, that it is not uncommon among his people, who never call in a doctor, and never lose a case. And, like most

ignorant people, he is profoundly contemptuous of medical science, especially when, as in the present case, it has to own itself baffled. He was wrong, of course—we all know that—but there's something to be said for him.'

'Yes, I admit that,' said the doctor; 'go on, please.'

'Well, it seems that there's no convenient shelter where the patient, as he calls him, could be tended in the gipsy camp; but, with or without my brother's leave, they have made a sort of refuge in his old castle, somewhere among the ruins, and there Simpson had this poor little loonie carried, and there he watched him, and administered the medicines or charms, or whatever it was that were supposed to cure him.'

'Faith, they haven't gone far that way,' said the doctor; 'he's pretty bad.'

'Simpson tells me he would be dead by now but for his treatment,' said Mr. William. He tells me that your patients, Dr. MacCulloch, who had this disease, died on the fourth day; it is now more than a week since the loonie's seizure.'

'True—very true!' the doctor replied.

'But, confound him!' ejaculated Sir John, who evidently was much put to it to command his patience, 'what the devil business had he trespassing in my castle! I'll rout all out the infernal nest of those thieving, smuggling, poaching scoundrels.'

'Not an easy matter, as you yourself said,' remarked the Fiscal. 'But pray proceed, Mr. Bradley.

How did it chance that there was no trace of Simpson when the loonie was found?'

'There, again, he made the mistake that an ignorant man is likely to make: when he heard that the boy had discovered them in the castle, he recognized that all appearances were against him; he was in charge of a man unconscious, and suffering from a mysterious ailment, in a place where he had no right to be, and where he was certainly trespassing. An educated man would have known, of course, that justice is invariably done in the courts, just as the best chances of recovery of a sick man are in the hands of the orthodox physicians; but he didn't know, or perhaps didn't believe. You know, gipsies have a most unreasonable prejudice against the law and courts, under whose sanction we enjoy our liberties; and, in short, he got scared and bolted.'

Was there a note of sarcasm in Mr. William's voice? If so, it was so faint as to be almost imperceptible.

Suddenly, and apparently apropos of nothing, the doctor put the same question to Mr. William that he had before put to his brother:

'Were you ever in Africa, Mr. Bradley?'

'I was; why do you ask?'

'You went up from the West Coast into the interior, a little south of the Congo.'

'I did. Do you know the country? What a glorious bit of scenery that is, where you emerge from the Congo swamps, and there's a little rise in the ground, and the primeval forest seems to stand

back a bit, and gives you the most magnificent view over the whole district !'

He spoke with an enthusiasm that his previous utterances had not prepared me for. The doctor, however, took no notice ; if he was expected to rise into eloquence over the beauty of Central African scenery, he didn't.

'That's the country of the M'Bula Wamba, I think,' he said, with a meditative air.

Mr. William at once grew animated. 'Ah, yes ! I see your point,' he said ; 'I have thought the same. You have heard of their strange command of the sleeping sickness, and you are on the thought that has been present to my mind any time for these last ten years, whether it might be possible that this strange disease that has come amongst us could be combated in the same way. It is possible, plausible certainly, but how could it be done ? None of the M'Bula Wamba ever left their own country, and even if they did it is only the sacred medicine-men who know that secret. Dr. Goetze, you know, the German who lived for years among them, and was almost like one of themselves, offered anything practically for the secret ; his Government were behind him, and gave him the fullest powers, but he could get nothing. It's all told in his book, "Unknown Tribes on the Congo." '

'Yes, I know !' said the doctor.

The Fiscal had been talking quietly to Sir John ; he now came forward and said :

'All this is very interesting, but I fear hardly relevant ; we must get on. May I take it, doctor,

that you cannot give us any decided report about your patient now ?'

'Not now, Fiscal, nor for a week, as far as I can see. At the end of that time, if he's still alive, I'll have something to tell you; and if he's not! well, I shall have an autopsy to report.'

'Very well, then; I'll just hear how you found this man. Probably Mr. Kingsburgh will give us that; he is accustomed to evidence. I only want brief notes just now.'

This was soon given, concurred in by the doctor and Sir John.

'I shall have to examine your old castle, I think, Sir John, with your permission; but that will do any time—no hurry. Now, if you please, we'll have the stalker and the keeper in.'

Their evidence also was soon given; they had but little to say. The boy Donald, notwithstanding his ultra-caution in telling his story to me, had been too full of it to keep it entirely to himself, and confided some hints to one of the women servants, who had told the stalker, and he, suspecting some nefarious work, had, under threats of condign corporal chastisement, got it all out of Donald, and immediately, after discussion with the keeper, reported it to all his master. He could say nothing about the gipsies—a bad lot, he opined; he knew every turn of the hill-side, and had no idea how they got in and out of their glen. Yes! you could go up above the burn, over the moor, certainly, but you were no farther forward; you just came to the top of a precipitous cliff that went sheer down over a hundred

feet, and another similar cliff at the foot of the opposite hill. These cliffs were about twenty yards apart—maybe thirty—you could lie on the top, and drop a stone sheer down. At the bottom you could see some stunted bushes, and he believed you could see the tops of some of the gipsies' habitations, but he couldn't be sure. Oh, it was a nasty dangerous place, it was ; a man might break his neck there quite easily. The head of the glen—oh yes, there was a wall of rock across there, and the burn shot over the edge, a magnificent waterfall. There were some trees that grew just about there, but above the head it was all open moor ; he knew all that part thoroughly well, but he would never take shooters there if he could help it, on account of the danger. Could men be lowered over the cliff ? Well, yes, if there were no gipsies at the bottom, or if the gipsies were willing to help, which they never would be ; for if they wanted to prevent anyone coming they could cut the rope as easy as lying.

So far the stalker.

'I think, Mr. Bradley,' said the Fiscal, 'that I should like to see your keeper's house, if you have no objection ; where does he live ?'

Within a stone's-throw of my own house. I can take you there, Mr. Grant. I have my trap here, and you can lunch with me, if you will.'

' All right ; I shall be very glad ; I think we've exhausted all that we can usefully do here.'

' I'll follow you,' said the doctor ; ' I have to pay some calls in Alt na Crois. Well, you're off ; good-bye, Mr. Grant ; good-bye, Mr. Bradley. I'll see

you to your trap. One word with you, Sir John, before you go.'

He bustled out with the Fiscal and Mr. William; returning as he passed through the hall again, he said to me *sotto voce*: 'I shall have to take him to see Mistress MacFarlane. I don't much like that job, but if I don't I shall be blamed if anything ever comes out about what she overheard, or fancied she had overheard.'

Going back into the dining-room, he said: 'Now, Sir John, I must insist on your going home at once and lying down. I shall give you a draught. You have had a more fatiguing morning than you are altogether fit for. Yes, you are all right to walk home and have lunch, but you must lie down directly after. I would ask you to lunch with me, but I don't want you to exert yourself at all after lunch.'

'I am in your hands, doctor,' said Sir John—'a a most obedient patient. We shall be just about in time for lunch if we start now, Mr. Kingsburgh.'

So saying, he shook hands with the doctor, and walked, a little feebly I thought, down the two steps leading to the gravel path before the house. At that moment Mrs. MacCulloch came out from the direction of the consulting-room, and I turned to speak to her.

'You were asking about the Cameron family, Mr. Kingsburgh,' she said. 'I had a letter from Miss Morag this morning. They are at Weston-super-Mare at present, but, she says, hoping to come up to the West Highlands in the early autumn; so you

may have a chance to see them, if you are still in these parts.'

'Was that the fat letter in a sprawly fist that you got this morning, my dear?' said the doctor. 'I didn't recognize Miss Morag's hand.'

'Oh, of course she didn't write herself,' replied Mrs. MacCulloch; 'her sister Kitty writes for her. She can sign her name now, though, and is very proud of getting so far.'

'Ah, of course, of course, poor girl! I was forgetting,' said the doctor. 'Dear me! what a shocking memory I have! You know, I never forget a case or an appointment in my own district, but directly anyone is out of the country, they pass out of my mind totally; it is a monstrous thing.'

'Oh, but you remember all about Miss Morag now, poor dear! She says here: "I am a very lazy drone, I fear. My mother and sisters do all the work, and I dream a lot; they are so good to me."' Mrs. MacCulloch was reading from a letter in her hand. Was I in a dream? Involuntarily, I recalled my afternoon, unforgotten, unforgettable, in the old Dower House, or what at the time I believed to be such, and how Morag had used those very words. I could hear in my mind her sweet, soft, lingering tones, wherein just a hint of the West Highland accent fell gently as a fairy's kiss. It was uncanny. How did my gipsy-girl Morag know the phrase and turn of thought of the other Morag? I was about to ask why that phrase 'of course,' referring to Morag's not writing with her own hand, when an exclamation from the doctor startled me; and, looking out, I

saw that Sir John, who had just reached the little green gate, seemed to be tottering and clinging to the gatepost.

The doctor ran hurriedly down the path and took him by the arm.

'Let me give you an arm, Sir John. You have a little overtried your strength this morning, so I will see you home. My dear, send the trap after me in an hour. I'll start from Airton House. Now then, lean on me, Sir John. Mr. Kingsburgh is on the other side. You are all right—slight vertigo, nothing whatever to be uneasy about.'

I had said good-bye to Mrs. MacCulloch, and hastened after them; so, one on each side, we conducted the laird back to the house. He seemed to shake off the passing weakness in a very short time, and before we got home he was talking as usual, and quite himself. Lunch was waiting, and we sat down at once. As soon as the meal was over, the doctor carefully measured out a few drops from a tiny bottle and gave them to Sir John, and for about five minutes after he had drunk it watched him closely.

'Now, Sir John,' he said, 'turn quickly and look out of the window.'

As he did so the doctor gazed intently into his eye. Then he said:

'You are all right, Sir John. Go to bed; sleep for four hours. When you get up for dinner you will feel just as usual. I'm going to ring for James now. You will be perfectly well. I'll look in this evening.'

The sound of the wheels was heard on the gravel. The doctor said good-bye, jumped into his trap, and was gone. Sir John, leaning on his man's arm, disappeared, with many apologies for leaving me to my own devices, and I had the afternoon to myself, a fact I was not altogether sorry for, for the events of the morning wanted some thinking out, and it was a glorious summer's day, hot and still, and with brilliant sunshine over the sea and hills.

For a moment or two I stood at the open hall-door wondering what I should do; then the gleam of the sun on the sea gave a convincing idea—a swim in those silver waters. That was an ideal pastime for this delicious afternoon. I returned to my room, and soon emerged with towels and necessary paraphernalia for a bathe, and walked down to the lodge-gates and out into the road, thinking over all the affairs of the morning, and trying to assort all I had now heard about the abduction of the poor little loonie; but as I passed the bridge by the Gipsy Glen I found that my thoughts were wandering, or rather, I might say, 'homing' to Morag.

I leaned on the bridge for a minute or two, looking eagerly at the point of rock where once or twice I had seen her. I could not account for myself. Strange as it must seem for a man past thirty, who had led a fairly social life, with a moderate fortune and no encumbrances, and few relations in the world, yet it was a fact that up to now women had played a very small part in my life. I had met many, made friends of a few, but love, as ordinarily understood, had hardly come into my life at all since very

early manhood—partly, perhaps, because in early life I had formed a very special ideal, and had never found any woman who realized it, and I would accept nothing short of it. Beauty, I said to myself, I must have—that is a matter of taste. I could no more have a plain woman about me than I could have ugly furniture or bad pictures. Then, she must be intellectual, or she could be no companion for me; and I usually found that beauty and intellectuality did not go together. And, beside, I wanted a loving nature—cold to all the world, but warm to me; and a hundred other more or less contrary qualities, which in the arrogance of youth I had decided must adorn the woman whom I should love. And so years passed on, and the impossible She did not appear, and I became more and more engrossed in my profession, and less and less inclined for even passing flirtations. Yet now of a sudden all this had been swept away, and I found myself looking forward with feverish eagerness to a meeting with a gipsy-girl, of great beauty, certainly, with all the cleverness and the glib tongue of her race, but probably—indeed, almost certainly—of little culture or intellect, of no social qualities as my world held them. What could be the end or outcome of such an infatuation? I could not see myself marrying the gipsy-girl; I could not see myself doing anything else. I could not imagine life with a gipsy; yet to think of life without Morag was like an utter blank and desolation. For there was no blinking or denying the fact now that my whole being—mind and body alike—longed for

Morag. It was a new and a strange sensation, and the old intellectual being that I had called myself hardly recognized the new emotional being that had sprung into sudden life. Had this strange, weird West Highland country taken possession of me, and changed my nature? It looked in cool blood a sort of madness; and yet within myself I knew well enough that I would not for anything have it altered.

The reader will recognize that with my mind in this ferment connected thought on the legal problems which presented themselves for my solution was impossible. No matter! a plunge into yonder sparkling sea, a swim out among those rock-pools and tiny islets and rock-points that broke its silver surface, would no doubt restore the lost balance, and cool this fever of the blood. Then, like the reiteration of a favourite theme came the idea of how Morag had exulted in the stories of the sea, the delight with which she had spoken of swimming by moonlight. Was it in these seas? Did she indeed come down and swim by moonlight, when the seals played over the silver-crested waves? Was I thinking of Morag my gipsy-girl, or of Morag the daughter of the Camerons, or of Morag the Seal of Donald's stories. The three seemed to be indissolubly entangled now.

At any rate, whatever were to be the outcome of this adventure, there was no drawing back. Time would, perhaps, solve this problem. Meanwhile, even though it were Morag the Seal, I could almost find it in my heart to say that it would be good to swim out and away, farther and farther, till the

shore dwindled to a faint blue line and then vanished, and nothing but the circle of the sea lay around us ; on and on, through the lap of the warm, translucent waves, over the coral palaces of the deep, with Morag swimming beside me, till at last, like a tired child, I should sink to rest, wrapped in her long white arms.

Why did these dreams and fancies come to me now, who never before had felt more than the most ordinary interest of the cultured man in poetry or imaginative literature of any kind ? I cannot tell. Perhaps the spell of the country called to some strange heredity from some far-off ancestor. Be that as it may, I was rapidly losing the characteristics, by which all my life I had known myself, of material logical reason, and was acquiring new characteristics which I knew not, and also—I could not blink the fact to myself—I was, though on the threshold of middle age, falling in love for the first time.

In actual fact, as I strolled along the shore, and after my custom put the situation squarely and without any equivocation to myself, in minute self-analysis it sounded ridiculous ; and yet full well I knew that I would not part with this new sensation, which now to me had become the chief part of my being. Law and legal problems, the success of my career, my friends, my life in London—all that had made up my life hitherto had faded to a dim, shadowy picture ; and the real vital interest of life was contained in the new experiences. Indeed, I had to face the fact, and acknowledge to

myself that my whole body longed intensely for Morag; and whether she were the daughter of the Camerons, or a gipsy-girl, or a soulless seal-woman, I candidly and frankly acknowledged to myself I cared not a scrap. She was Morag, and Morag I wanted; and if this were madness, very well! I did not want to be sane. My habit formed in early youth of logical self-analysis did not leave me; and I was able to face the problem, and to say to myself that I had no near relatives, no one dependent on me, and if I took my life into my own hands and determined to live it out in my own way, I was hurting no one. How far it would have made any difference had circumstances been otherwise, it is impossible for me to say. Probably it would have made but little difference, and all worldly ties would have seemed as faint and shadowy as did now all my material and professional life.

The sea was Morag's element, and for her sake now I loved it more than ever before; and I was walking along its margin and watching the plash and sparkle of the tiny wavelets. The shore was white limestone, shelving gently down to the water, with patches of yellow sand, and here and there deep pools, wherein sea-anemones of brilliant colours opened their flower-like petals to the bright sunshine. Limestone cliffs rose behind me, and turning round a prominent rock, I came on the most deliciously secluded cave—a natural bathing-house. Here, then, I threw off my clothes, and plunged into the gleaming water. It was a glorious swim. At every stroke fresh beauties seemed to open out, as

the little bays and promontories came into view. I dived, and swam under water for a time, opening my eyes and looking through the green glimmer, shot through with golden rays; watched the long streamers of vivid green water-weeds, that waved like banners from the jagged edges of the limestone rocks, shining white through the transparent green. It was all lovely as a dream; then I came to the surface again, and I felt, somehow, how delicious it would be if only Morag were swimming beside me; how she would revel in this glorious summer day and this water! And almost I fancied that she was actually there, that we were really swimming side by side, racing over the little billows that gleamed golden and green before us.

In my exultation I sang aloud a chorus remembered from some old college song:

> 'Then welcome, O thrice welcome!
> My bridal night shall be—
> When I shall sleep ten fathom deep
> With the fairy of the sea.'

What were those dark spots out to seaward?—something gambolling and playing out there in the offing?—Seals, as I live! The desire took me to swim out to them. It was mad, wild, ridiculous, but yet overmastering. I said to myself that I had never seen a seal at close quarters before. It was a chance that might never occur again to know something about their appearance and habits; but, all the same, my old legal and logical turn of mind made me honest with myself, and I knew perfectly

well that this was the merest fabrication of a reason to try and convince myself that it was right and judicious to do that which I wanted to do, or had determined to do. Such subterfuges are, I believe, very efficacious with persons of weak nature and untrained brain, who first determine on a course of action by impulse, and then invent (it may be unconsciously) logical reasons for so doing. Impulse and reason were thus striving with each other as I swam—impulse urging me on, and fabricating excuses which reason would not accept, and reason saying insistently, 'Go back.'

At this moment a long, low musical note sounded from the shore. It was like a woman's voice, but not in pain or distress exactly; it was a note of calling to her mate, and the sound seemed to thrill through me. I turned, and saw a woman standing on the cliff above my cave. What was the strong attraction that drew me towards her, that gave me the idea of Morag?—for indeed it was too far off to recognize more than that it was a female form. Nevertheless, so it was, and now emotion was on the side of reason. As for the pack of seals, they were uninteresting brutes whom I could see at the Zoo if I wanted; dangerous, too, to approach at close quarters. I had no desire whatever to venture into their neighbourhood. Moreover, I had certainly swum far enough, and it was some distance to the shore. Above all, I wanted to be back.

I turned my face shoreward and swam fast and steadily in, and as I came nearer to the rocks and my cave, the woman's form disappeared. Whether

she walked down the slope on the other side of the cliffs or whether simply my change of position hid her, I could not clearly determine. Anyhow, I reached the shore, tired, but with a great sense of well-being and contentment, due, I suppose, to the tonic stimulus of the salt water and bracing exercise. I dressed rapidly, lighted a pipe, and lay down on the soft, warm sand. A great sense of comfort and delicious well-being seemed to permeate my whole frame, and the burden of fifteen years was lifted as by a magic spell. My work and all my life in London seemed very far away. I was no longer the somewhat cynical and a trifle blasé man about town; no longer the successful lawyer, who was little else, and gradually but surely dropping into a dull, shoppy groove; I was the young man fresh from college, with the world before me, impulsive, eager-hearted, ready to face and conquer everything—in fact, a new life had opened before me. Morag had come into my life; there was an interest now, possibilities I had missed. All the grey of life was touched by an enchanter's wand, and, lo and behold! it was lovely with opaline hues, prismatic glories of the rainbow, the dancing lights of the sun on the spray. Grey, forsooth! There is no grey when the heart is young.

Soothing were all the influences of that hour, and all its perfumes which I remember so clearly to this day—the scent of the sea, blended with the scent of the heather, and a faint undertone of the scent of the peat reek; and the sun glimmered over the sheeny waves, where I dreamed that Morag had

swum beside me. Suddenly I heard the long, soft, crooning call, the cry of the Gaelic woman, calling in the cows to milking—the tender call with which so many of the love songs end, when the lass stands by the door of the lonely shieling, and the lad breasts the steep brae. There was a familiar note about it, somehow. I sat up ; in an instant I was round the rock that sheltered my cave to the left hand. There, on a big boulder, her dark chestnut hair catching all manner of strange gleams in the sunlight, stood Morag, a smile of welcome on her bonny face, her two hands held out in greeting.

CHAPTER X

MORAG indeed it was, in actual warm breathing reality. I held her by both hands, gazing entranced into the dear dark brown eyes that had haunted so many dreams. I drew her nearer to me, and folded her in my arms, while our lips clung close in a long, long kiss; then I held her off for a space that I might devour her beauty with my eyes, remembering how I had longed for her.

A change had come over my experience of my beautiful Morag, or rather, I should say, the dual range of experiences, which made it seem so bizarre and unnatural, were blending into one and assorting themselves. When I had first seen her in the old Dower House, or what I imagined to be such, it had been like a new and strange experience suddenly intruding itself into my life; all my former existence seemed to have passed into a kind of dim dream hardly remembered at all; but when I was away, and had passed beyond the glamour of those woods, the adventure itself looked like a dream, and the more I thought of it in calm moments the more unreal it looked.

But I saw her again, and then she and her sur-

roundings were the only real things, and all else was a vague memory. This was greatly enhanced by the inherent improbability, as it seemed to me, that a young lady of the station and upbringing of a daughter of the old Camerons, who seemed to be a proud, reserved race, should thus yield herself to the love of a casual stranger, seen for the first time; and thus I found my life, as it were, divided into two distinct sections, each independent of the other, till, like the hero of 'La Morte Amoreuse,' I did not know which was the real and true life.

But now that I realized that Morag was a gipsy-girl, loving and lovable, with a strange hypnotic power, doubtless, but with nothing else uncanny about her, and who, perhaps for love of me, or perhaps only for pure mischief, was playing a very innocent game, my whole mental attitude was changed. The game was a good game, I decided—a game of make-believe such as we used to play in the long-ago days when I was a small boy, playing with other small children. I would play it now again; I would wholly forget my own identity; I would forget that Morag was a gipsy-girl; I would frankly accept her own version of herself without question; indeed, while I was with her I would refuse to think for one moment that she was anything but Morag Cameron, the daughter of the last legitimate owner of these fair lands of Ard na Righ, and my sweetheart by the grace of her own sweet preference. Thus in a moment were all the tangled threads sorted into one. A bizarre, many-coloured strand, it is true, fit only to tie a gipsy-girl's copper-coloured hair.

I have tried to put these thoughts into words; in reality, they passed with the speed of thought itself, and the sensation was just that of settling into equilibrium after uncomfortable wabblings.

'Morag,' I said, 'is it your real veritable self? It seems too good to be true.'

'Yes, Ralph, it is I myself,' she said; 'and come, I think, in opportune time to prevent your doing something foolish. Didn't you hear me call when you were swimming?'

'Yes, I did; I heard a note that called me back. Was that you? But why did you call me, Morag? I was dreaming that you were swimming with me. It was like a dream of heaven.'

'Don't dream when you are swimming in West Highland waters; that was one of the first lessons my dear old father taught me. They are not safe waters to dream in. Besides, there were seals out in the offing.'

'I know! I was looking at them; but what of that?' I wanted to get her to talk about the seals; the old legend had a queer, uncanny fascination about it for me.

'Why, don't you know?' said Morag. 'Seals——' She paused suddenly. 'No; of course, you are a Southerner—you wouldn't. But, you know, seals can be very savage; they bite terribly. Oh, suppose you had been attacked.' She shivered; clearly she was not to be drawn about the seal-legend, but her anxiety for my safety was certainly most ineffably sweet.

'It was when I was swimming towards the seals

that I seemed to be swimming beside you, dear,' I said; 'and how lovely you looked in the water, with your long hair streaming behind you, and the pink and white gleaming through the turquoise blue of the waves! I felt we were racing, and your long steady strokes were drawing in front of me.'

'I know,' she said. 'I watched you swim, and I fancied myself out there beside you, that is what you must have been conscious of.'

I was beginning to understand Morag. Some long-hidden vein of poetry and romance, deep down in my nature, responded to her delicate touch, and thrilled an answer, and by degrees this chord swelled and grew until it dominated all the rest of my being; nothing now seemed to matter, save artistically to enjoy to the full all the exquisite beauty and perfection of Morag. And how perfect she was, how daintily complete in mere physical beauty, from the heavy masses of her dark, copper-hued hair, and the sweet pale face, now looking so saintlily grave, and now bubbling with fun at some unexpected turn of humour; the great brown eyes that were half sad with wealth of love, whose steady gaze tugged the heart out of a man's breast, and yet at times could sparkle with mischief, or gleam with laughter down through the tall, graceful, supple figure, to the small white feet, that I now saw were bare! She seemed all perfect, exquisite, and new—in very deed, fresh from God's hands.

And how sweet was the intimacy of that suggestion! she fancied herself swimming beside me;

therefore I had seen her, or thought I saw her, swimming beside me. How close, then, our souls must be! A gipsy-girl! Never! Morag was an enchantress, descended from the ancient gods and heroes of this strange Western land; her remote forefathers must have sung their weird chants around the stone circles, or below the serpent mounds. Long lines of noble ancestry alone could give that marvellous charm. In a moment I felt how unworthy, how blind I had been. Half cynically, I had dissected my feelings for Morag. I had speculated about her, and she—she had stooped in all her beauty and graciousness to love me, contemptible as I was. Was ever such a thing known on earth since Dian herself stooped from the heavens for the love of Endymion? It seemed almost incredible that this delicious creature should thus come to me, trusting, loving, seemingly glad to come, and that I, oaf, insensate as I was, had criticized, analysed, even partially blamed her for so doing.

All that was past now. Morag was the goddess of my dreams, my inspirer, my comrade. I took her in my arms and kissed her again, so delicious was it to hear her murmur loving words, with that unmistakable love-coo in her voice which no man who has ever heard it can afterwards forget.

'Now, sit down and talk reasonably,' she said; 'I have such a lot to say to you.'

We sat down on the soft sand under the shade of a great rock, looking lazily at the great sunlit sea, flashing all its glorious colours; the sails of the fishing-boats turned to rich umber and burnt-sienna hue,

with here and there the white sails of a pleasure-yacht, and the blue hills out on the horizon, clear at their summits against the pale opaline tint of the sky, but fading into fainter hues at their bases, with just hints of rose here and there, where the now westering sun touched their edges.

Morag nestled close up to me, fitting herself into my side with that supple grace which was peculiarly her own.

'Seals!' she said after a little pause 'Yes, you know, they call me Morag the Seal sometimes, but that's all nonsense; I suppose it is because they have the old tradition of that ancestress of mine that I told you about.'

'But she was good, you told me, Morag, and used to heal the people. Seals are cruel and fierce; she could have been no seal. Besides, she was too like you, dear! to be anything but sweet and kind and good.'

'Yes, she was a healer; and I don't believe a word of the stories of her sitting and singing on the rocks, while the sailor boys died for the love of her. But, still, the folk about here believed them, and it sometimes happens, you know.'

'How can it happen? Forgive me, dear! I am a Southerner, you know, and all this is so strange to me.'

'Well,' she said, 'isn't it quite clear if she had been cruel and fierce and like a seal, and had thought of herself like that, and thought strongly enough, then, of course, those of our people who had the sight would see her like that. You know, dear! you fancied you saw me swimming beside you, just be-

cause I thought of myself there; and you are a Southerner, and I don't suppose you can have the sight; so just think how much more clear it must be to our folk, who have been accustomed to have the sight for generations, and have never doubted it, any more than you doubt what you see with your eyes. I remember when I was quite a child being taken to see Sarah Bernhardt in some great tragic part—I forget what it was—but I thought she was a fine tall woman. I was awfully surprised when I saw her off the stage afterwards; she just thought herself six feet!'

'Tell me of your life, Morag,' I said. 'Where do you live? How do you come and go? You are like a spirit to me—a wraith of the woods and the sea. I can hardly look on you as a material mortal woman.'

It was the curiosity which has made the tragedy of a hundred fairy-tales, of the lover concerning his fairy mistress, or the girl about her godlike lover, of Psyche about Cupid, of Elsa about Lohengrin; and I almost repented, and half expected that Morag too would vanish because I had impertinently asked concerning her life and belongings. She replied, however, quite naturally and simply:

'Why, of course, I am living now at the Dower House, you know, where you first saw me.'

'But, Morag, how can that be? The Dower House was burnt down; I saw the blackened ruins myself.'

For a moment her sweet eyes looked troubled; her brow contracted as if in the painful effort to

recall something that treacherous memory had slipped. Then she said:

'Yes, yes! I know; of course, I remember they told me that—poor old house! But we call the place where we live now the Dower House, just because of our love for the old house; you can understand that, dear—you who understand so well—and we like to make it as like the old home as we can, and try to think it is the same. So, you see, I come and go as I please, for I am not strong, as I told you, and they do all the work. I am just a drone, and they are so good to me.'

Again that phrase. My memory ran back to the letter the doctor's wife had read, but that was from Weston-super-Mare. However, I was in no critical mood. What Morag said was the only thing that was true, or that mattered. Other people's mistakes and foolishness would be all sorted out and explained in time.

'I think, you know,' she went on, 'the folk here see me about, and they've got the old tradition, and they think that the old Morag whom they called the seal-woman is still about. And then, of course, you know there have been some strange deaths, and the Bradley brothers have put the story about that it was Morag the Seal, and so all the blame has come upon poor me.'

'But,' I said, 'Sir John Bradley is furious if anyone even speaks of Morag the Seal.'

'So he pretends; but you don't half know the cunning and the wickedness of the Bradley brothers yet. He is mortally afraid of Morag the Seal, and

in that way I am able to play with him and keep a hold on him. I frighten him out of his wits now and then. But all the same, he manages to make the people believe that poor Morag kills the fisher-boys. And, dear me! I love them all. They are all my own folk, you know, and there's nothing I would not do for them.'

'But those deaths,' I said. 'They were real enough.'

'Oh yes, sad to say, they were real, poor boys! But listen! Every one of them knew something about the Bradley brothers, and that was why they had to die. And how they are killed I don't know, but the doctor knows or suspects. Trust him, dear! He is honest and true. He brought me into the world.'

'God bless him for that!' I murmured fervently. 'I expect they'll find I know too much presently,' I went on. 'I have found out a good many things. Thanks to you, little comrade, for all your help and sympathy!'

'Don't thank me,' she said. 'I knew when fate sent you down here that you had come to help us, and to get us out of the tangled web that the Bradleys had woven round us. I knew we had a strong arm and a clever head and the truest heart in all the world to fight for us, and your mission is bound to be carried out. You know I have the sight, and I can look into the future a bit; and the Bradley's time is nearly up now, and it is your hand that will finally crush out that cruel and evil race. They will try to kill you, however. You already

know too much for them. Tell me,' she went on, with a change of tone, and speaking in a brisk, businesslike way, 'did you not write an opinion for Sir John Bradley?'

'I did, only two days ago.' My thoughts ran back to the opinion I had written on the afternoon of the day when I had seen the blackened ruins of the old Dower House, and how fully therein I had marshalled all the facts and the arguments for Sir John's case. In the event of my death that opinion would be valuable as the considered opinion of an expert, for I had unconsciously given it that form, and it would be the most important aid to any counsel getting up a case for Sir John.

'That opinion was your death-warrant, so far as the Bradleys are concerned,' said Morag. 'That was what they wanted to get. Now you are no further use to them, and a very possible danger.'

I am physically no coward, and was quite ready to face anything the Bradley brothers could do, even granting the strange, mysterious forms of death they seemed to have at their disposal. Forewarned is forearmed, and, after all, a man can die but once, and I should die in the service of Morag, anyhow; but I own I thought for a moment that she might have shown a little more concern in speaking thus calmly about my death, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world. She read my thought at once; perhaps it was written in my face.

'Don't think me horrid,' she said. 'You know well, dear, that if you really died I should come

after you as quick as I could. Now you have come into my life I could no more live without you than I could live without air. Oh, life of my heart! you are all I have—the very soul of this poor body.'

I strained her close and kissed her fondly, and she went on:

'But I heed not, because I see, I know, that they will fail—that the end has come of all their evil. I do not know how it will come, how it will happen, but I am certain this time. Sometimes I have doubts of my dreams and my visions. There is much of delusion even for us who have the sight as the heritage of many generations, and I have heard the old seers say sometimes that when one loves one cannot see anything for those who are dear to one; also, I have never been able to see at will. Sometimes, when I most want to see, it is all dark; it was when my dear father died. And, oh! I was so afraid I should see nothing for you. You will guess the blessing and the relief when the vision came so clear and strong that there was no doubting it.'

'Well, tell me, darling,' I said. 'What am I to do? How can I serve you now? How can I defeat all these plots and crimes?'

'Listen,' she replied, 'and remember carefully. The records you are in search of prove our title conclusively. Sir John pretends to want to find them, but he knows well that were they once found it would be the end of all his treacherous schemings, and of his usurpation of my dear father's rightful inheritance. Those records, as I told you, are all

hidden in the old castle. No one knows where they are but me. Sir John doesn't know, or they would have been destroyed long ago, even if he had to burn down the old castle to do it. It will be a risky business, but you must get them, and you will succeed, I know. To-night look out of your window about midnight. All the house will be asleep then. I have some hypnotic power, as you know, and I have exercised it on Sir John before now. At midnight, then, I will show you how you shall get the papers.'

I tightened my arm around her, for I felt instinctively that the moment of parting had come.

Suddenly a loud roar sounded in my ears. My arms grasped nothing. I lay on the sand deafened, half blinded by a cloud of smoke blown into my face, and the smell of gunpowder in my nostrils. Where was I? Where was Morag? What had happened?

Some black heads of seals were swimming away a few hundred yards from the shore, one close in, almost in the wash of the waves, swimming slowly. A low, sobbing cry, half a wail, came back, mingled with the plash of the water. In the wake of the seal the waves were faintly dyed red.

Then I heard the doctor's voice.

'You infernal idiot! What in the face of the earth are you up to now?'

''Deed, doctor! I think I've hit the witch this time — a real silver bullet. I wouldn't trust a button of my kilt any more. It's sham they are, and that was why I didn't kill her before.'

It was the quavering voice of an old man. As my senses came gradually back to me I recognized that this must be old Sandy Macpherson, who was said to have shot the seal with the silver button from his kilt before, and who swore to the Fiscal that he had never said anything of the kind, and never seen a dead body on the shore.

Still my mind was hovering between sleeping and waking. I wanted to take him by the throat and shake the life out of him as a terrier shakes a rat, for had he not in cold blood slain, or at all events wounded, my beautiful darling Morag. The next moment I heard the doctor's clear, calm tones.

'Go away home, you drunken old fool! You've made a complete ass of yourself before the Fiscal already. Don't do it again. Hello, Mr. Kingsburgh! Is that you? What, bathing, and then sleeping on the shore! Dangerous, my friend, dangerous! Look here, what I've got!' He held up a strange-looking fish.

'What in the world is it?' I said. 'I never saw a fish like that before.'

'No,' he said; 'I should think you hadn't. It's one of the rarest tropical fishes, drifted up here on the Gulf Stream, I expect; and if I'm right, this is exactly the thing that's going to cure that poor little loonie. Man, I'm on the edge of the greatest discovery of modern science! Come away home with me for half an hour. Sir John won't be up till near seven. No good for you to go back to Airton House yet. I'll tell you all about it by the

way; also, I must tell you another thing that my man told me he'd heard from Morag. What he says he hears from her has a strange trick of coming true—at all events, I always feel it isn't to be disregarded. It's about you this time. Come on.'

CHAPTER XI

We walked back together to the doctor's house, he carrying his fish with more anxious care than a mother displays for her first baby.

'This is really most extraordinary,' he said. 'As soon as I got home from my drive to Alt na Crois (I'll tell you about that afterwards; it is interesting, too, but nothing to this), I was called off to a confinement in one of the cottages by the shore along there round the point. I thought it would soon be over, and I told my man to wait for me. He seemingly made a better shot than I did, for he guessed I should be over an hour, as, in fact, I was; so he hitched the horse to a post and amused himself with fishing. The shore there is all rocks, and they shelve down in one place to a tremendous depth quite close in to shore—a precipice under water, in fact. Well, there he let down a long line with half a dozen hooks on it, baited with mussels—you know there are any amount of them on these rocks—and when I came out of the cottage he showed me this chap. He thought I should give him a wigging for fishing without leave instead of attending to the horse and trap—I nearly embraced him.'

'But what is it, doctor? It's a queer-looking, ugly brute, anyhow. I never saw anything like it.'

'I'll tell you all about it in a moment. I shouldn't have minded if horse and trap and everything had gone over the cliffs so long as I got this. Well, then, as we drove towards home he said to me, "I've seen Morag, sir." He knows I won't laugh at him. Many would; I know better. "Well," I said; "what's the matter now?" "You've got to make an injection, sir, and give it to Mr. Kingsburgh." "What injection?" I said. "Couldn't say, sir," he replied. "Morag only said an injection." You may guess I was much puzzled at this. Why on earth you should want an injection, and what sort of an injection, I couldn't fathom. I had nothing that I knew of that could be of the smallest service to you. Then he caught this fish, and then I knew.'

'But I don't. Do, like a good chap, enlighten my Cimmerian darkness, and tell me what it's all about, and what is this wonderful fish that you are carrying as if it were a millionaire infant, at the very least.'

'It's a great deal more than a dozen millionaire infants,' said the doctor, lifting one end of the coil of wet seaweed in which he had enveloped his precious specimen. 'This is the *Derris elliptica therapeutica trypanosomiasis*. I don't think it has an English name, and the Malay one is too long and uncouth for use.'

I thought the name the doctor used was not precisely the sort of pet name one would like to be

calling all day after a strayed fish, but I said nothing. Better to let the doctor tell his own story.

'From this fish,' said he, 'is prepared the only possible antidote, so far as is yet known, to the sleeping sickness; and probably if, as I think, the mysterious illness, which has overtaken the poor little loonie and many others here about, is of that character, we may vanquish it by this same antidote. I found it by accident when I was in the Malay Archipelago, when I was a ship's surgeon. Most of my colleagues despise native cures, and will have nothing to do with them, even branding those who study them as quacks. I have personally found that there is much worth studying in many of the native remedies. "Purely empiric," Ogden said to me, when I had him down to investigate this very thing. "And what, Ogden," I answered, "is all our science? Empiricism from start to finish—from A to Z? We give drugs because we have found they do good in the majority of cases, but we haven't the remotest idea why they do good. We pretend we have; but that's just because we are infernal humbugs, the best of us." Oh, he was angry—a most pompous man is Ogden. Well, as I was saying, I found something like the sleeping sickness among the Malays, and they deal with it, and very successfully, with a preparation made from this fish. It's a most odd thing. You poison the fish with a drug which, luckily, I have. Luckily, too, this fish is alive; that's why I'm carrying him so carefully, you see. Then you hang him in the sun for a certain time. I only hope the sun will be

strong enough. Then, when he is beginning to decay, you must put him under heavy pressure, and a juice will exude from his scales. This you have to treat in a special way. I won't bore you with the details—you probably wouldn't understand them, anyway—but the resulting liquid is fatal to all low forms of life, though comparatively harmless to man. Now, the sleeping sickness, as known in Africa, is caused by a special microbe infecting the blood and paralysing the nerve centres of the human victims, but only fully developed so as to reproduce itself in the body of the *Glossina palpalis*, which is a variety of the tsetse. If this brute, then, bites a man infected with sleeping sickness, and then some short time after bites a healthy man, he injects into the latter the developed microbe, which proceeds to paralyse him also, and so on. But the juice of this fish, injected into the blood, is, as I told you, fatal to low forms of life, and destroys the microbe, and there you are. I hunted for it in order to try it on those strange cases I have had here before, but all in vain. Now, by the most opportune accident—if it was an accident—it turns up just at the moment that I may possibly be able to save poor Allen Kerr, and also at the same time comes this remarkable message my man professes to have from Morag, to give you an injection. What can the injection possibly be but this, and of what use can it be but as a protection against any attempt to inoculate you with this terrible disease? I told you that every person who had suffered from this disease before had been in some

way connected with Sir John Bradley—giving him information, or somehow working for him, and knowing a great deal about his affairs. You fulfil the same conditions.'

'But, doctor,' I said, 'you are bringing a most terrible indictment against Sir John. He has always appeared a good friend to me, and you yourself have treated him as a friend, and in a way that it would be impossible to treat a man whom you even for a moment suspected of such abominable treachery and cold-blooded intent to murder.'

'Stop a moment, Mr. Kingsburgh,' said the doctor. 'You are jumping to conclusions in a way unusual for your legal acumen. Suppose there were some one whose interest it was that Sir John should fail to establish his title, and who was utterly unscrupulous, such a person would certainly try to put out of the way anyone who got information enough to prove Sir John's right.'

I confess this view of the case had not struck me, yet there was clearly force in it.

'Mind you,' continued the doctor, 'I don't say it is so. I'm not sure that I think it even possible; but one must not lose sight of the idea, nor rashly condemn a man on mere conjecture.'

'Tell me now, doctor,' I said, 'as you have told me so much, why did you ask both the Bradleys this morning about Africa and the Congo?'

'I was fully answered,' he replied. 'The fact is I have been there myself, and was for some time with the tribe of the M'Bula Wamba. You will read all about them in Goetze's book. Of course

they will never give away their secret knowledge; it is a kind of religion with them, and probably only known to the sacred medicine-men, but this much I made out for certain, that they can both induce and cure the sleeping sickness artificially—that is to say, without there being any cases within hundreds of miles, and without the presence of the *Glossina*. You will understand from what I told you that this is a marvellous feat. It is almost incredible that a practically savage tribe should be able to do what we, with our best equipped laboratories, are unable to manage; yet so it is, and by our own methods, too, I fancy. They seem to prepare some kind of a culture—Heaven knows how. They use the blood of an infected person, and they use the body of the *Glossina*, or some of the juices drawn from it, and they do something with elaborate ceremonies which no one is allowed to see but the medicine-men inside the medicine-huts, and they get a virus. This is kept in a special kind of bag—I believe it is a part of the intestines of a particular kind of small monkey, and this the medicine-man always carries under his arm-pit. In this way it is said it will keep fresh for a long time. If a thorn of a special kind of cactus is dipped in this, and a man pricked with it in the nape of the neck, he will develop the sleeping sickness in what to us seems an incredibly short time, and will infallibly die. The form is much more virulent than that induced naturally by the *Glossina*. I mentioned this to Ogden when I had him down here to see the cases I told you of. Of course he sneered.

He had been in Africa, but he had never seen the sleeping sickness in its own haunts, just south of the Congo, and he had never been among the M'Bula Wamba, and he took it all to be a traveller's yarn. It was contrary to the official accounts of the disease, therefore it must be romance.'

'But what about the cure?'

'Well, that is equally secret, but I did make out that it was prepared from a very rare fish found only in the mouth of the Congo, and by rare luck I once managed to get a sight of it, and it was certainly very like my friend the *Derris*, here (I spare you the rest of his name). Long afterwards, when I was in the Malay Archipelago, I found the natives there making an injection from this fellow and using it for malaria. I at once thought I had tumbled on the secret, but I could never get hold of a *Derris* until to-day. After all, it's all empiric. I may be wrong in my idea of the preparation, and when I've got it it may be no good for the sleeping sickness, or this strange malady may be something quite different, or there are heaps of other possibilities. Still, I do think there is definitely the hand of Providence in this, and I'm so convinced of it that I'm going to put it to the proof.'

'I, too, believe in it, doctor, and will trust you so far that you shall give me that injection you speak of.'

I was so engrossed in the doctor's scientific account of the mysterious malady that I had not mentioned what was so vividly prominent in my own mind—my meeting with Morag. We were

now at the turning in sight of the doctor's green gate. He was hurrying home to deal with his precious fish. I said hastily:

'Doctor, I saw Morag to-day, just before you came upon me. I want to know what you saw.'

'I can't quite tell,' he replied. 'I thought I saw the same tall, graceful figure of a woman that I saw, or thought I saw, with the lad who was drowned, and then Sandy Macpherson dashed past me with his gun and roared out, "There is that accursed witch! I won't miss her this time!" and I tried to stop him, and he fired, as you know, at a seal on the beach; and then I came upon you, as I thought, just waking from a sleep on the shore, and you know the rest.'

'That disposes of the idea of the gipsy-girl, then,' I said. 'Whoever or whatever Morag may be, it was no gipsy-girl playing tricks this time.'

'It looks unlikely,' he answered; 'but I wouldn't say it could not be. I am always very shy of saying anything is impossible. Here we are at my gate. I must go in and see about my *Derris*.'

'Just one moment more, doctor. Do you think that the way a person thinks of him or herself at all affects the way that person looks to others?'

'Why, of course it does! It is the veriest commonplace that the world takes us at our own valuation. It is the secret of successful actors and pleaders, and all public speakers. Their hearers see not themselves, but what they fancy they are. Of course, in hypnotism it is much more definite. If you get a patient thoroughly hypnotized, and imagine your-

self to be the King, without a word said your patient will do you reverence as if you were. Now, good-bye, good-bye! Come and see me soon. Probably I shall look in to see how Sir John is this evening. Good-bye.'

He was gone, and I started to walk back to Airton House. Something—I know not exactly what—attracted my attention in the old castle, and instead of going straight up to the front door I walked round by the back, looking curiously at the old ivy-mantled walls that held such curious secrets and mysteries. However, they disclosed nothing now. I paused by the little court under my window. A gardener had been nailing up some creepers; his hammer and list and nails lay on the ground, and his ladder was resting against the wall under my window. I thought for a moment of the possible danger of burglars, then concluded that burglars were most unlikely in such a remote country place, and that, anyhow, the gardener would remove his ladder before night. The stable clock was chiming seven; dinner was at half-past. I was still carrying my towels and bathing equipment, so I hurried round to the front door and up to my room to dress, casting a glance of fondest love on the old pastel which I had now identified with Morag, and regarded almost as though it were her own portrait given by herself. So vivid was my imagination that the picture seemed to smile back upon me with the same supreme surrender of perfect queenly love as was in her own sweet eyes when we met.

Sir John was down to dinner, apparently just the

same as usual. It was wonderful how rapidly his attacks passed off, severe, even alarming, though they seemed at the time.

He spoke quite naturally and frankly of the events of the morning. Chiefly he seemed troubled by the doctor's indignation at his offer of a reward for making the little man speak.

'I should willingly give that sum, or double or treble as much, if he wanted it, to a specialist,' he said. 'But I don't believe in specialists, though I would gladly pay for one if it were thought desirable; so why in the world shouldn't I give the same to our own good Dr. MacCulloch, whom I do believe in and trust? It seems absurd, doesn't it?'

I tried to explain that every profession had its own etiquette. Ours at the Bar was rigid enough in some respects. I did not know what the doctors' etiquette was precisely, but, whatever it was, Dr. MacCulloch could not infringe it.

Sir John was only half satisfied.

'He needn't have been so indignant, anyhow. One might have thought I meant to bribe him. I was only meaning a kindness, both to him and to the poor sick man. What do you make of the case, Mr. Kingsburgh?'

I told him how puzzling I found it, and that really the facts hardly warranted even a guess yet.

'I can't help thinking,' he said, 'that, somehow, my poor brother and that gipsy rascal are concerned.'

I inquired what could be the possible motive.

'Well, you see, Mr. Kingsburgh, you must know by now the manner of man my brother is, passionate and

greedy—I fear also unscrupulous. He is dissatisfied with our father's will. Really, I have, as you know, far more reason for dissatisfaction, but somehow he has got it into his head that he is the progenitor of our race in the future, and that as he is married all the estates should come to him after my death; indeed, I believe he thinks he should have them now, and he pretends that this was my father's wish. Now, probably this poor Allen Kerr had or knew of papers proving exactly what our father's intentions were, and if so, it is not unlikely that this gipsy rascal persuaded him (he is really not quite sane on some points) to allow him to put the poor man out of the way.'

I noticed one remarkable point about Sir John Bradley, and the same thing seemed to characterize his brother also: whenever I thought I discovered a suspicious circumstance, before I had had time to ask a question, he informed me of the fact in the frankest possible way, and with an explanation that was certainly logical and consistent. What he said now squared perfectly with all that I had heard from the doctor, with Mrs. MacFarlane's account of the conversation between William Bradley and the gipsy Simpson, and also gave a suggestion of the previous mysterious illnesses or murders, or whatever they were. Moreover, though blaming William, the chief onus was thrown on the gipsy. If this was art, it was art of a very high type, and convinced me that if Sir John were really the unscrupulous and heartless criminal I had almost brought myself to believe him, he was a criminal of no ordinary kind,

and one of a subtlety and ingenuity of resource that would take a very astute man indeed to circumvent. Nothing in the world seemed to take him aback, no discovery to cause him to lose his presence of mind for one moment.

I inquired what was his view of the sudden illness of the little loonie. Above all things, I saw that I must keep on the friendliest terms with him. If he were as evil as I half feared, then, if he thought I knew it, farewell to my chance of discovering his villainy; if he were an honest and sorely wronged man, as he would have me believe, then he was my client, and I was bound to make his innocence clear to the world.

'I think,' he said, 'that the key to that lies in my brother's statement that the gipsies know well both the disease and its cure. Maybe this Simpson, who is an utter blackguard, I fancy, deliberately placed the little man in the way of contracting the infection, or whatever it is, and took him away to die—I fear I must infer with my poor brother's connivance—but that he was frightened by Donald's seeing him in my old castle, and hence he bolted. I don't suppose we shall ever see him again.'

We had come to the end of dinner. I had lighted my pipe, and Sir John was smoking the one mild cigarette he allowed himself. A ring at the front door announced the doctor. He came in with a roll of old discoloured paper in his hand.

'Ah,' he said, 'you are all right again, I see, Sir John. Don't overtry your strength again; agitation is not good for you, and you've had too much of

it lately. I have brought round a pedigree I came upon among the rubbish of that office; nothing new, but it shows the irrefutable nature of your claim very clearly. See here, Mr. Kingsburgh: here is Neil Cameron, the common ancestor, and here are his two sons—Ronald the eldest, Dugald the second. Ronald, you see, succeeded; he had one daughter, Elsa; she went away, and married, you see here, a certain John Wilson in Yorkshire; she, again, has a daughter, Anne Cameron Wilson, who marries William Bradley. Now, of course, under that old entail, of which you have the draft, when Ronald died Elsa was his heiress. Then here, you see, Dugald, the younger brother, had two sons, Neil and Ian, and a daughter Morag; she, I believe, was the one they called the witch. Well, Elsa was away—no one ever seems to have thought of her as the heiress—the old entail was lost. No one doubted that Neil was the heir; he took possession, and his great-grandson was the last Cameron of Ard na Righ. Of course there are minor things: Elsa made a runaway Gretna-Green marriage, and some other little points, but I'm assuming all that proved, as it will be, when those records are found.'

'But what about prescription, doctor?' I said.

Sir John interposed angrily.

'Prescription doesn't run against fraud—you ought to know that, Mr. Kingsburgh; and if ever there was an arrant fraud this is one.'

It was useless to suggest that there had been no fraud whatever—a perfectly natural mistake, even if it were a mistake. The old man went on:

'Besides, it is the moral right. I care little for rights depending on Acts of Parliament; no lapse of years can make a wrong right, whatever Acts of Parliament may say. That was the reason my father gave all that money, not to buy what was our own, but to secure the justice that a rascally Act of Parliament would deny us.'

He was agitated and excited. Suddenly he leaned back in his chair, his eyes strained till the white showed all round the pupils, and stared through the window, open, as it often was after dinner, to the soft air of the sweet West Highland evening.

'Who is that?' he said in a strained unnatural tone; 'a strange woman walking through my grounds—who is it?'

I looked up quickly; certainly I seemed to see a tall, slender figure, closely veiled, passing along the drive, yet I could not be quite sure if it were a woman or merely an effect of the evening light on the slowly rising mist, that now hid the stems of the trees. The doctor apparently saw nothing, and said so. Sir John, however, gradually sank back into his chair, as if falling asleep. The doctor passed his hand with a gentle downward sweep over his forehead, and in a few moments his eyes closed, and he breathed with the regularity of sleep.

'The effect of the dose I gave him has not quite passed off,' he said. 'I'll put him to sleep for half an hour, and it will be all right—nothing to be disturbed about; it's only the natural going-off of the slight vertigo of this morning.'

The tranquil sleep did not last long, however;

soon the old man began to murmur, and we caught disjointed fragments of sentences :

'No, I tell you you have no right. I am of the Cameron blood as well as you are—you are no Cameron. . . . You are an evil witch. . . . No, I say I will not. . . . I am a Cameron, and I'm going to marry a Cameron, and my children shall be the heirs of Ard na Righ. . . . No, no ; leave me ! The heiress of the Camerons shall drive you away . . . evil witch !'

His voice was rising to a scream of terror. The doctor made some passes, and pressed his thumb between the old man's eyebrows, stroking the eyebrows themselves outwards, and slightly pressing the lids, then gently stroking the sides of the head. At every stroke the face grew calmer and more relaxed, the breathing more regular, until he passed into a calm, quiet sleep.

'I don't want to use the hypodermic if I can help it,' said the doctor softly. 'This is really quite normal, merely what you would call a nightmare. He has this curious delusion about the guardian spirit of the old Cameron family that persecutes him, and sometimes, if he's at all off colour, he dreams of it ; otherwise he usually throws it off.'

I could not, however, quite get rid of the idea that I had seen a woman's form out on the drive ; could it be Morag ? The doctor clearly had not quite given up the idea that she might be a gipsy-girl with hypnotic powers, and he was evidently an authority on this obscure branch of medicine. If so, and if she hypnotized Sir John as she had done me, then

the thing was explained. I suggested this to the doctor.

'Yes,' he said, 'it's possible, plausible; assuming that we were right about your experience, the other might follow. Also, what you were asking me about a person appearing in the guise in which they think of themselves would work in very well with this idea. Suppose the gipsy-girl thinks of herself—I mean, images herself to herself, you understand—as, shall we say, fond of you, as your friend and protector, the effect on you would be a pleasant, soothing sensation on the nerves. If she fancies herself the avenger of Sir John for some wrong he has done her, or that she thinks he has done her, the effect on him would be the reverse; his own brain would do the rest, and supply the idea of the spirit of the old Camerons persecuting him. It is not, I think, in the least necessary to suppose that she knows anything about the Cameron story.'

'Then,' I said, 'you think there's something in that idea?'

'Of course there is. Didn't I tell you my experience with the native doctor? That was a case in point. I knew also of an old lady who dreamed she went to console a friend, and the friend dreamed at the same time that the old lady had come and consoled her, and yet neither of them moved from their houses, which were three hundred miles apart. Besides, you can do it yourself, if you try. Just concentrate your mind hard on some dear friend of yours when he or she is asleep, and think of yourself as walking into the room and speaking; if you

only concentrate your attention firmly enough, and imagine it vividly enough, your friend will dream of you. Anyone can do it who can imagine clearly enough, and hold a concentrated thought long enough.'

'Yes, doctor, perhaps; but how few can!'

'True; perhaps there are more than one thinks, if they would but believe in themselves and try; it is quite a natural thing. I've know many cases, more often with the blind than anyone else. By Jove! that reminds me. I wonder if . . . no, that won't work; never mind.'

Sir John here moved uneasily, then opened his eyes, yawned, stretched himself like a man waking from a sound sleep.

'I fear I've dozed; you must pardon me,' he said. I've had rather a tiring day; I am a very discourteous host sometimes, I'm afraid; but I know our good Dr. MacCulloch will do all that is right and hospitable. What's the time, doctor?—time for another whisky-and-soda before bed?'

'No,' said the doctor firmly; 'it's late. I'm off, and you must go to bed now, Sir John; you only dozed a few moments, but enough to show that you need rest. Good night.'

I followed him to the door.

'He remembers nothing whatever,' he said. 'He is perfectly normal now; the effect of my draught has passed off entirely.'

I met Sir John in the hall, leaning on his man's arm.

'Don't go to bed unless you want to, Mr. Kings-

burgh,' he said. 'Don't mind me; stop and smoke, or read, or anything you like. I know you will pardon an old man who is not very strong. Good night!'

He was gone. It was not yet eleven. I sat down and lighted a pipe, and thought out the events of the day. Clear on my memory was Morag's tryst: to-night, at about midnight, she would show me where the records were hidden that would prove the title of her race to the fair lands that once were theirs—her own title, indeed, for the entail that should have given them to her father would carry them to his eldest daughter; yet, if the pedigree were correct and the entail exactly in terms of the draft, this very same female succession would have cut out her father altogether. So, then, if her father had right, perhaps she had none. It was puzzling. I was thinking of Morag as being what she pretended—the eldest daughter and heiress of the old Cameron race. Of course she was not that. It was impossible that she could be the girl who played these tricks upon me; yet it was quite possible that the gipsy-girl, in whom the doctor still believed, was playing them in her interest, perhaps was an intimate friend—foster-sister, maybe; such things have been—and was working in the interest of the real Morag. And she with her hypnotic powers, and Simpson the gipsy, with his alleged command over the strange malady that was so like sleeping sickness, were both working for the old Cameron race, playing on my imagination, terrorizing Sir John, removing any persons likely to be awkward. Clever,

unscrupulous, criminal perhaps, but loyally faithful to the race they served and that they had grown up with ; it was quite the gipsy character. The more I thought of this, the more did things seem to be shaping themselves to a clear solution, and the tangled threads of this strange story to be uniting into a logical and compact whole.

All the same, was the Morag of this afternoon's adventure on the shore real at all, whether gipsy-girl or any other ? I had held her in my arms ; even now her sweet kisses seemed warm on my lips ; but when the roar of Sandy Macpherson's gun sounded in my ear I clasped nothing, my arms were empty, no soul was in sight, a herd of seal were near in to shore, and one—could that be Morag ? Could there be any truth whatever in that wild, weird legend ? Could the red stain that dyed the water be the life-blood of my darling ? This was utterly incredible, but if not this, then the Morag of this afternoon was a real being of flesh and blood, however she had disappeared. That was simply some delusion on my part. I was half asleep, half hypnotized by the spell of her beauty and her graciousness. She had seen Sandy coming, and had slipped behind a turn of rock ; of course, she wouldn't want to be seen. That's it. Well, it will soon be solved now ; if it was a real person posing as Morag, she will put in an appearance to show me those records, or tell me something about them ; if she doesn't keep her tryst, I shall conclude I was dreaming, or saw a ghost or something.

I put out the lamp, took my candle, and walked

leisurely up to my room. At midnight Morag had bidden me look out of my bedroom window. Midnight was, in fact, chiming from the stable clock as I locked my bedroom door, for I felt no desire to be disturbed if, indeed, there should be any appearance.

I threw open the window and looked out; the moon shone clear and bright, nearly full; the air was warm and calm; not a leaf stirred; hardly even the tiniest ripple broke on the beach beyond the road. As I looked, something seemed to detach itself from the ivy of the old castle, dim for a moment, and then the form of Morag stood out clear on the wall opposite to my room, silhouetted against the soft dark of the sky. She put a finger on her lip and beckoned; there, by a strange chance, still stood the gardener's ladder that I had noticed in the afternoon. In a moment I had climbed out of my window and down the ladder. The end of the wall opposite was broken with projecting bricks, very easy to scale; it was short work to get up there, and in less time than it takes to tell I was standing beside her on the top of the wall before the little door leading into the old castle, from which plainly she had just emerged.

It was a different Morag from my sweetheart of the afternoon, alert and businesslike. I would have embraced her, but she drew back with an almost imperceptible signal of caution, and whispered, 'Follow me, and make no sound; only notice carefully every clue; you will have to find this for yourself afterwards.' She seemed to melt into the ivy, but as I followed I saw that she passed through the little door that opened from the summit of the

wall into the tower. Here she took a small lamp from a ledge, and led the way up the winding stair. After one turn we came to a landing; she pressed her foot on the edge of a stone between the bottom step and the wall of the turret; it canted slightly, disclosing an iron spike seemingly driven into the wall just at the angle of the step. She stooped and pulled this upward; a stone turned in the wall, revealing a dark cavity beyond.

'Put your hand in there,' she said, 'and bring out what you find.'

I did so, and drew out a bundle of papers. By the light of her tiny lamp I looked at the endorsements. The uppermost was 'Marriage of Neil Cameron and births of his children, Ronald and Dugald.' Here were evidently some of the lost certificates.

The next one was 'Marriage of Ronald Cameron and births of his children, Elsa, Neil, and Morag.' Eagerly I opened this one. There was the register from the old kirk of Loch Righ with, no manner of doubt, the births and baptisms of Ronald's children.

'Do you see now, Ralph dear,' said Morag, 'that Neil is my great-great-grandfather, and his sister is Morag the Witch, as they called her, and they are all the children of Ronald Cameron, the eldest son of Neil. So, of course, Neil was the heir of Ronald, and Ronald was the eldest son of the older Neil, and thus there is no doubt of our title. Now, look here.'

She handed me another paper, endorsed, 'Marriage of Dugald Cameron, and birth of his only son Ian, who died unmarried.'

The whole thing was clear now. The Bradleys, trusting to the loss of the registers, or, perhaps, to give them credit for honesty, not knowing the fact of the loss, had ascribed these two children, Neil and Morag the Witch, to the younger brother, making Elsa the heiress.

'Come away now,' said Morag, replacing the bundle of papers in the secret hiding-place, and turning the stone back into its bed. 'Only remember carefully how this is to be opened and the secret of the recess, for I shall not be with you when you come again.'

We passed out of the low door and emerged on to the wall. As we did so I heard, or thought I heard, a step on the road below, and, peering over, I was convinced I saw a little gipsy-looking man stealing away. When I turned, Morag had disappeared.

I climbed down the wall and returned by the ladder as the stable clock chimed one, considerably perturbed, and not a little excited by my nocturnal adventure.

CHAPTER XII

WHY did I not carry off the records, when I had them in my hand, and fully realized their great importance? This question exercised my mind very greatly in the morning, and many were the solutions I propounded to myself for not doing so. I said to myself that it would have been very embarrassing to account for how I became possessed of them; that documents of such supreme importance as these ought to be verified at once by independent witnesses in the very position in which they were found; that I could not very well account for my presence in the old castle at that hour of the night, where I had certainly no business to be. Moreover, I could hardly claim to be on my host's business, since these records, if I had rightly read the few bits I was able to see, effectually and for ever disposed of his claim to be the heir of the old Camerons by right of blood. All this was very well and very specious; yet in myself I knew well enough, though I would not willingly admit it to myself, that they were all fudged up after the event to try and account for it. The real fact was that I *could not* have removed them, that throughout I was

acting as one does in a dream, apparently with most complete volition, yet unable to control the tiniest detail of the vision; yet it was no dream—of that I was sure. Morag was a living, breathing reality, and all that I did with her was done in waking consciousness.

Here again, as I have said before, I was a new man. Did this strange West Highland country call to some old forgotten Celtic strain away down in the depths of my nature, waking up new ideals, new aspirations? As I thought of Morag now, I knew well enough there was nothing on earth that I would permit to come between us. I realized that I was not a man who could love or hate by halves. I had set Morag up on a shrine, the goddess of my dreams, the divinity of my passionate adoration. Cheerfully I would plunge through the nethermost pit to reach her; cheerfully would I kill anyone or anything who dared to cross my path. Looking back to what I had been so short a while ago, I felt that I had been half asleep, that these last few days had waked the manhood in me. I now knew my strength, my virility, and it was all due to Morag. Moreover, the knowledge of the world that lies just beyond the realm of our senses was beginning to open to me. I was no longer the silly sceptical boy, believing only what he could see and handle, but knowing perfectly well that the spiritual realities are far more real than the mere phenomena that touch our five senses; and, knowing this, I felt that the mysteries of the world of Nature and of the universe were opening to me, and

the problems that had perplexed the wise men of the world for so long, and which had been such a source of pain and trouble to myself, were now assorting themselves, becoming clear as day. In a word, I felt that I had grown from an egotistical, cynical, and rather priggish boy, with one bound into a man; strong to love, and of will and determination to take and to hold what he loves; strong to reason and to understand; and knowing my strength, I was self-reliant.

In spite of my discovery of the records, I saw no reason for the moment to cease my work for Sir John. Granted they were real and genuine, as I firmly believed, they only affected the sentimental side of his title, on which I knew from the first he could never insist. His father's title, as having lent large sums of money which had not been repaid, was what I was now working on, and I waited for Morag to give a light on this part of the case, for whatever she might wish, that would I do.

So for a few days the usual routine of life went on. My main interest outside of Airton House and beyond the papers I was studying was concentrated on the doctor and his fish. His treatment of the little loonie was so far successful that the patient did not die; on the contrary, he seemed to gain strength, but not one bit did that curious coma relax. Living, breathing, but unconscious, not hearing, seeing, or speaking, he lay there day after day in a living death that was more awful than death itself. Sir John, meanwhile, was urgent,

almost clamorously, for any possibility that he should be cured, should be made to speak somehow.

In these days I hardly saw the doctor. He was constantly engaged either with his patient or with his fish experiments all the time that he could spare from his practice, and was usually not visible; also, my work kept me pretty close.

One morning, however, his man dropped a note in passing.

'DEAR MR. KINGSBURGH,

'Come to lunch to-day, if you can; I am brimful of news for you.

'Yours very sincerely,

'DUGALD MACCULLOCH.'

I had arranged to go over some old banking accounts with Sir John, in the search for verification of the transactions connected with his father's loans to the last Cameron of Ard na Righ, which, it is only fair to say, were coming out far more clear and convincingly than at first appeared possible, and, so far as I could see at present, seemed to bear out Sir John's story of the large advances, which were never repaid, and the accumulation of principal and interest, in consequence of which the legal processes were initiated whereby the estates had finally passed to Sir John's father. Already I thought there was really almost, if not quite, sufficient to demonstrate the fact that he had an indefeasible title.

Sir John, who was sitting with me in the smoking-room, caught sight of the doctor's handwriting.

'Has Dr. MacCulloch sent you any fresh news of his patient?' he said.

'No. He asks me to lunch, but, of course, I shall not go. Our investigations this afternoon must take precedence of anything.'

'Oh, go, by all means, Mr. Kingsburgh. To tell you the truth, I am rather weary with what we have done; my brain feels exhausted, and I think a drive would do me far more good; besides, I am most anxious about that poor little man. It seems that it is most extraordinary, almost incredible, that he should have lived so long; but this alone gives hope that perhaps the doctor may, after all, pull him through; but the last reports were most alarming—in fact, the doctor told me frankly that he was dying. I shall be most thankful if you can bring me back better news. Probably the doctor will talk more freely to you. I think he has been rather reticent with me, perhaps on account of the strong interest I take in the case and the extreme importance to me of the poor little man's recovering his power of speech. The good doctor is afraid of raising false hopes.'

We finished up that bank-book which we were engaged on, and which certainly showed the withdrawal of large sums about the period of the loans supposed to be made to Cameron, and made a note that these, having been nearly balanced by large payments in from the Bradley estates in Ceylon, the bank account had remained about the same;

and then the work was closed for the day. Sir John ordered his carriage, and I strolled down to the doctor's. He met me with a radiant face.

'Congratulate me, my dear friend!' he exclaimed. 'The *Derris* is a triumphant success. Oh, man! it is the discovery of the century. If only everything works out as it promises, we hold the key of the sleeping sickness; and just think what that means! The whole of Central Africa, from east to west, from the Congo to Mombasa, freed from the scourge that was going near to making it impossible.'

'But your patient, doctor! Sir John told me he was dying.'

'So he was, only last night—dying of his cure. I thought it was all up with him, and I told Sir John so; but the cure got the better of the dying, and now he's going to live, and, what's more, *he's spoken.*'

'Oh!' I said. 'This is great news, indeed. Sir John will be delighted.'

'Hum!' said the doctor. 'Ha! well, maybe; but, with your good permission, Mr. Kingsburgh, I don't propose to take Sir John into our confidence just yet.'

I was too astonished to speak. The one thing that Sir John had been urging so persistently, and which seemed to be the thing that was needed to prove his *bona fides* beyond all question, and his desire for which seemed to prove him to be desirous of the truth above all had happened, and he was not to be told of it.

'I know it sounds surprising,' said the doctor;

'but wait a moment till I tell you. I was some time preparing that fish injection, and I had to use the remedies I had—good, but not powerful enough. I just kept him alive—in fact, I think whatever the poison was that was used, or however he got it, it must have been a very small dose, or weak, or something, or he would have died in spite of me. Well, then I gave him the fish stuff as soon as I could get it done, and the immediate effect was alarming. He collapsed almost utterly—that was last night. Sir John was passing, and I told him then—which was absolutely true—that I didn't expect the loonie to live through the night. He seemed very much upset.'

I cannot say if it was fancy, but it certainly appeared to me that the doctor, perhaps unconsciously, laid a slight stress on the word 'seemed.' He went on:

'Suddenly, about twelve o'clock, he moved slightly, opened his eyes, and panted a little, as if struggling to speak; then the words came in a sort of choking whisper: "Bradleys bought the firm—cursed swindle!" then he seemed exhausted; then, after a long pause, "Forgery—damned villain!" and after this no more. He relapsed again into much the same state that he has been all along, but his blood is better this morning: the microbes are diminishing, and all functions are more normal. But now you will see that all this rouses most uncomfortable suspicions about our friend Sir John. I hate to have these suspicions, but my medical knowledge tells me that probably this poor little

man was on the point of disburdening himself of some secret that was oppressing him when he was suddenly overcome by this strange attack. If the gipsy's story is true, then I imagine the poison was administered to him in some way by some person unknown some days previously, allowing time for incubation, and then the attack came on suddenly while he was in the gipsy's company. You see, this is, if I am right, a variant of the sleeping sickness. That comes on gradually; this, in almost every case, suddenly; also, it has a much shorter incubation, but so far as microscopic investigation and cultures go, the microbe is identical. Well, then, being thus smitten down with the things he was going to say, so to speak, all ready formed in his brain, and only waiting for utterance, as soon as the first scrap of power of the speech organs comes, the words come out automatically. I don't in the least think he meant to say what he did, or was in the least conscious of saying it. But now, don't you see, if Sir John or Mr. William have really done anything shady, it is most desirable that they should have no inkling of what this little man says. If, on the other hand, they have not, then time will show, and it would be needlessly distressing Sir John, and in his present state of health exposing him to an undue strain to let him hear these disjointed sentences and vague accusations. I am quite willing to believe—what is, indeed, just as possible—that the last thought of the loonie before his seizure was to make some accusation for purposes of blackmail,

and his lips, on recovering power, formulated the words he meant to speak; but in that case it would be my duty as a doctor, even at some expense of truth, to protect Sir John, who is also my patient, from a shock which would be seriously detrimental, if not actually dangerous, to a man with his tendency to heart disease.'

I could not but admit the force of the doctor's reasoning; and at that moment the luncheon-bell sounded, and Mrs. MacCulloch, meeting us in the hall, conducted us to the dining-room.

This good lady bulked far more in my imagination than she had any idea of. There was some connexion, which I could not fathom, between Morag—*my* Morag—and that other Morag, the daughter of the Camerons, and Mrs. MacCulloch was my only link with the latter.

Strange as it may seem, of my Morag I knew nothing whatever. I could not see her unless she chose to come to me. I might never see her again, and I was absolutely helpless. Had I mentioned her name, these country folk would have strained every effort to save me, as they would think, from an evil enchantment. Yet well I knew, for all that, Morag now dominated all my life, so that even the kindly, matronly, somewhat colourless Mrs. MacCulloch seemed clothed in an atmosphere of romance, and my heart beat hard at the sight of her; yet, explain it who can, I could not broach the subject of Morag. Here, again, my nature was changed, for hitherto the training of my profession had made me fairly glib with my tongue, and only

calculating the best time to ask a question, with the instinct of the cross-examiner; but intensely as I longed to hear about Morag, there seemed a sort of sacrilege in opening the subject, and I talked of indifferent matters. The doctor spoke of the Fiscal's investigations.

'Has he found anything yet?' I asked.

'I fancy not much,' said the doctor; 'but he is very reticent. There is a thing or two, however. It seems that Simpson the gipsy hasn't gone, after all, but the Fiscal can't get hold of him. He hasn't been to his house, and he hasn't been down here, but he's been seen by several people on the moors. Of course, these gipsies live anywhere, and more readily out of a house than in one, so that doesn't count for much. Then the two Bradleys have been seen together more than once in very close conversation. Oh yes, by the way, there was one curious thing. Two days ago Mr. William Bradley went to Glasgow, and there he went to see a missionary man just home from Central Africa. They were closeted together for a long time. There doesn't seem to me to be much in common between either of the Bradleys and missionary work. So I had the curiosity to inquire about this man, and I understand he is more of a black sheep than African missionaries usually are—was, in fact, expelled from the ministry of his own denomination (I don't know what that is) for undue dealings with the natives; had half a dozen native wives, among other things, I was told, which of itself is unbecoming a missionary, I should say;

also, he had married them with the native rites and customs, which they say are pretty black; and he had been known to take part in some of the native fetish rites. I don't know how far all this is true, but it seems to be reported, and William came away with a little parcel that he carried as gingerly as if it were dynamite.'

'Did the Fiscal tell you all this, doctor?' I asked.

'Tell me! Bless me, no!' he replied, with a chuckle. 'Honest man; he never tells anything; but he asked me questions, and gave himself away every time; also, I have friends in Glasgow who keep me informed. I am convinced, Mr. Kingsburgh, that we are in the meshes of a very subtle machinery of crime—whose I am no tyet prepared to say—but it behoves us to be very wary, and to neglect no means of information which may unearth the conspiracy and place the guilt on the right shoulders.'

Here Mrs. MacCulloch interposed.

'You men are talking far too seriously for lunch-time,' she said. 'How often have you told me, Dugald, that grave topics should be banished at meal-times for the sake of the digestion. Do you know, I can't make out why it is, but, somehow, Mr. Kingsburgh always recalls the Camerons to my mind, and especially my dear Miss Morag.'

'Have you heard from her lately?' said the doctor.

Here was the subject I was longing for, started without any connivance or interference of mine.

'Only this morning,' she said; 'and, curiously,

how it again tallies with Mr. Kingsburgh being with us)! She has been dreaming so much, she says. I am sure, in a way, that she has the sight. Constantly, too, she has been haunted by the old prophecy—Thomas the Rhymer, wasn't it?—

> '"When the town of the King on the King's point stands,
> Then Camerons shall win back their lands."'

In a flash I recalled my first meeting with my Morag, and how she had started at hearing my name, Ard na Righ, the point of the King—King's burgh, the burgh or town of the King—and how she said I was the man who was to come. How did all this work in? I could not have dreamed of this quaint old prophecy which I didn't know. The gipsy-girl—if it were a gipsy-girl—might have heard it from Miss Morag Cameron, and have applied it to me.

Mrs. MacCulloch went on:

'She dreams of all the old home places—the Dower House, where they lived. She says she can hardly believe that it is burnt down, it looks so real to her; and the old castle, where they used to play. She says she dreamed one night that she saw a great treasure hidden there—quantities of money in canvas bags, in a sort of iron safe or box, but she can't tell exactly where—and then always she sees some Prince Charming, who is to come to her and take her away from all trouble, poor girl! How I wish some Prince Charming really would come for her! But I fear that is a vain hope. Then she dreams of the Gipsy Glen.'

'Pardon my interruption, Mrs. MacCulloch,' I said; 'I don't in the least know why I should ask, but was Miss Morag ever, when they lived here, great friends with the gipsies of that glen?'

'How curious that you should have asked that!' said the good lady. 'Yes; she certainly was, with one especially, whom she called her foster-sister. I remember her well; the gipsy was really, I think, some years older than Miss Morag—a wild, bare-legged slip of a girl, who was in a way put in charge of Miss Morag when she was a little bit of a thing, and they grew up together almost like sisters. Sometimes they would change clothes and pretend to be each other, to bewilder strangers. I have heard Miss Morag was quite a pet in the gipsy camp. I often remonstrated with Mrs. Cameron about it, but her husband had had a great fancy for the gipsies, and anything he had done was quite sacred in her eyes after he was dead. And so I believe when they went that this gipsy-girl went with them as a sort of servant or attendant on Miss Morag. I never heard of her having been seen hereabouts since.'

'Here, then,' I said to myself, 'is the veritable solution confirming my imaginings and the doctor's reasoning. The gipsy-girl has come back. She is devoted to Miss Morag, and is working in her interest. Miss Morag has what they call the sight, which, I suppose, is some species of clairvoyance. I never believed in it before, but I can't help it now, and the gipsy-girl has some hypnotic powers. One or other of them has recognized me as having

the legal knowledge necessary, and between them they have managed to convey to me some facts that throw great doubt on part of Sir John Bradley's title, and still more on his character and his honesty, and by fascinating me with the weird beauty of the gipsy-girl they have won me over body and soul to the service of Morag and her race. Well, all the same, there is that legal process that put Sir John in possession of the estates—for good hard money, too, which he paid, and which the last Cameron received, whatever he did with it. There was no getting over that. I might take Morag—*my* Morag—my gipsy-girl, in my arms and carry her off, my bonny bride—mine, and mine only, for ever. I might do this—probably I shall—for I feel more and more that I can't live without her, and if any other man should try now to take her from me it is in me to kill.'

I was letting my thoughts run on in this train, when the doctor called me to his consulting-room. I had, I fear, been but little attending to what was going on, and answering good Mrs. MacCulloch rather at random, so elated was I at having at last got the facts of the mystery into something like order.

'I remember, Mr. Kingsburgh,' said the doctor, as he closed the door, 'that message which my man gave me from Morag. I don't mean Miss Morag Cameron, but Morag the Seal, as they say, that I was to give you an injection. It can only be this *Derris* beast, and I have used nearly all I got at the first go-off for the wee mannie, but I'll give you

now what I have. It is not much more than a half dose, but you shall have more as soon as I can prepare it. Just turn up your coat-sleeve.'

I did so—a tiny prick, a little gentle massage of the doctor's skilful hands, and it was done.

The doctor's trap was at the door, so with rapid adieus we parted, he on his rounds and I back in the direction of the castle.

As I passed over the bridge by the Gipsy Glen I stood for one moment looking up at the beautiful stream that came brawling down over the rocks, and wondering somewhat idly how in the face of the earth it was possible that any human beings could get in or out of that seemingly impassable place, when I became aware of a strange figure beside me, who rose apparently out of the ground—a wild, handsome face, with long black hair, piercing eyes, and long earrings in the ears, a black moustache, a red silk handkerchief twisted over the head, and a slouched felt hat over this, a velveteen coat worn with a certain dandyish, devil-me-care sort of taste, a bright-coloured cummerbund round the waist, knickerbockers and shoes with large silver buckles. It was not difficult to recognize Faa Simpson, the king of the gipsies.

'I have a message for you,' he said.

'From whom?' I ejaculated, all my suspicions aroused instantly.

'From Morag.'

'Nonsense, man!' I said. 'Stand aside, and let me pass. I have no time to stop talking now.'

'Indeed, I have a message, and I can prove it, if you will but do me the honour to step down to the burn-side for one moment off the road.'

He held a paper in his hand, as he stepped down himself, motioning me to follow him. Curiosity made me do so.

Under the arch of the bridge, standing on a great boulder, he unrolled the paper he held in his hand.

I started in amazement, and almost lost my footing. It was a copy of the pastel drawing in my bedroom.

'Take care,' he said, as my foot slipped into the water, and he passed his arm round me to steady me. As he did so I was conscious of a slight prick at the nape of the neck—the bite of a midge, I thought, or something of the kind.

'You will believe me now,' said the gipsy; 'but I will not give you the message, since you have doubted. In three days I will bring you a writing from the original of this picture.'

He was gone, and I walked back to the castle.

CHAPTER XIII

THREE days had passed with never a sign of Morag. Things were beginning to look rather hopeless. I had not an idea where, or how, or by what means I could communicate with her; moreover, my work at Airton House seemed to be about done—as far, that is, as I could do it on the spot. The constant labouring at one subject was unusual for me, and the West Highland air was enervating. Anyhow, from whatever cause, I found myself suffering from unaccountable fits of weariness and depression, even once or twice falling asleep over the papers. It was in a fit of depression of this kind that I told Sir John that my work called me back to London.

I was surprised at the energy with which he opposed the suggestion.

'Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said, 'it is impossible—impossible. I pray you reconsider your plans. You have come down here to help me, and, indeed, I cannot dispense with your help. I trust I have made you comfortable, as comfortable as an elderly invalid can make a young man; but I beg you to believe you are essential to me. I know well at what sacrifice of time and money you have come,

but I will make it good. And in the meantime, if a cheque for two or three hundreds on account of your fees would be any convenience, I will gladly write it this moment.'

Sir John was by nature, I knew, somewhat penurious; he must be very much in earnest to make this offer, and make it in all sincerity too, for he drew his cheque-book from his pocket as he spoke. I hastened to assure him that my agreed fees were quite satisfactory, but the incident set me thinking. I must stay—that much was clear; and immediately there came a relief and content, for here, at least, I had a chance of meeting Morag, whereas if I went away I should lose her altogether. Then the gipsy's words came back to my mind; in three days he would bring me a writing from the original of the pastel; this was the third day. Would he, could he do it? True, I had never seen a scrap of Morag's handwriting; the cunning rascal might palm off anything on me, and call it hers. Of course, now it was not Miss Morag Cameron, for Mrs. MacCulloch and the doctor had both assumed that, of course, she did not write with her own hand—why, I could not guess; but then there was Mrs. MacCulloch's curious story of the gipsy-girl who had been brought up with Miss Morag, a foster-sister, even as I had supposed in one of my attempted solutions, and how they had mystified strangers by pretending to be each other. This was the author of all the quaint tricks upon me. Well, gipsy or no gipsy, she was *my* Morag, whoever she was—*my* Morag, whom I now acknowledged to myself that I loved better than all the world beside.

And, in sooth, I cared not whether she came from the oldest and proudest of the old Highland races, or from a tinker's camp; it would be a glory and an honour to me when she came to me as my bonny bride; and come she would, I felt sure of that—sure now at last in my own mind of her love for me as I was of mine for her.

These points being clear, the rest of the story followed quite naturally. The gipsy girl, so Mrs. MacCulloch had said, had gone away with the Camerons; she and Miss Morag had concocted this scheme to enlist me and my legal knowledge on their side; the gipsy had returned to carry it out, and had perhaps unexpectedly complicated the plan by falling in love with me. Some new development was now to be brought about, which must be communicated to Miss Morag, hence the three days' delay. Weston-super-Mare Mrs. MacCulloch had mentioned as the place where the Camerons were staying; three days was the time to write and get an answer. Meantime I was feeling too tired for work; I would stroll out and see whether any further adventures awaited me at the Gipsy Glen. If I found no one there, then I would take a walk along the shore; but there was an undefined idea in my mind that somehow I should meet and talk again with that gipsy-girl whom I had learned to call Morag—*my* Morag, my queen—she who through the days that were to come was to sit by my side, my inspirer, my goddess. It was with delightful anticipations that I walked along the familiar road and turned round to the left at the lodge towards the gipsy bridge.

I can hardly say whether I was surprised or not to see Faa Simpson in all the splendour of gipsy holiday finery lounging over the parapet. It was all like a strange dream, wherein one knows not precisely what one does expect, and is not surprised at anything, and yet feels everything to be unreal. His manner was deferential and yet haughty, as one might imagine a King constrained for a moment to play the part of a vassal.

'You have kept your appointment, I see—sir!' he said; and there was a slight, almost imperceptible pause before the 'sir,' as though it were an afterthought.

'Of course I have,' I said. 'You know you promised to show me some writing.'

'To be sure I did—and so I will. I am going to show you even more than that: I am going to put a trust in you I never thought to put in any Georgio. I am going to trust you with the secret of our way into this glen, which has puzzled the police, and the gaugers, and the keepers, and everybody for years and generations.'

The fellow spoke excellent English, though rather theatrically; yet to me there came a shade of distrust just when he seemingly desired to inspire the most trust. Why should this jealously guarded secret be given to me, an outsider and a stranger of whom he knew nothing. Legal training disposes a man to look for a sinister motive in any case where no motive is manifest, and it must be confessed that legal instinct is right in nine cases out of ten. The only motive, however, that I could guess at must be

somehow connected with Morag; her name, or rather her picture, was the glamour that had brought me here. Of all the clues that I had thought of to her identity, the gipsy camp was the only one that seemed in the least degree promising; to reach her I was prepared to take all risks and count them nothing. Perhaps the way to her led through the Gipsy Glen; perhaps I should have to fight my way out; perhaps I might be kidnapped and held to ransom. No matter; the way led to Morag; forward, then, at all hazards.

These thoughts flashed through my brain in far less time than it takes to tell, yet the pause was momentary, and the quick gipsy noted it.

'You are suspicious,' he said; 'I don't wonder. Our race are not famed for giving anything for nothing. Enough that I have my motives, and I have my orders, and I know I can trust you; I am never deceived in this. Come!'

I had already made up my mind to come, or his speech would not have inspired any great confidence. I climbed down the little path beside the parapet to the edge of the stream, which ran here pretty full and wide. A somewhat rough and awkward path led up through trees and among large boulders on the left-hand bank, past two turns, and then there burst on the sight the most beautiful waterfall I had seen for some time; not from its height—for it was not more, perhaps, than twenty or five-and-twenty feet or so of sheer fall—but in the rugged and picturesque surroundings. A great body of water dashed down a perpendicular fall from between

two crags, entirely filling the space between them, and plunging into a deep pool below. The rocky sides streamed with ferns, and the greenest mosses; the stones, where they showed through the verdant veils, were of old red sandstone, of a rich orange, a deep red, or a lovely rose colour; slender rowan trees, that had rooted themselves into the crevices of the rocks, waved and met over the boiling waters; taller trees, oaks and ash, grew a little back from the water.

I stopped and gazed spellbound at the beauty of the scene. The gipsy pointed with an inimitable gesture at the fall.

'The front-door of our palace!' he said. 'Do you think it would be an easy one to force open?'

There was no possible doubt about it, no man lived who could scale those rocks in the face of that fall; even had there been no water there, the ascent of that perpendicular wall of rock would have been a tough problem for the Alpine Club.

'It is impregnable,' I said. 'Whatever is your way in, it is not here.'

Stepping close up to the edge of the water beside the fall, the gipsy, pushing his loose sleeve up to the shoulder, thrust his arm between the rock and the falling water. I looked in great astonishment as the volume of the stream gradually diminished. Instead of leaping in a full strong rush, bounding out from the rock, it became like a gauze veil spreading over the face of the stones; then a multitude of trickling rills, which grew fewer and fewer, till there was hardly any water coming over the top of the crag.

'What has happened?' I said.

'What happens in every millrace every day,' he replied; 'a simple sluice turns the water into a side-channel. The only thing here is that the force of the water itself works the sluice, instead of a man winding up a capstan. See, there is the stream coming down from behind you to the left. From the road you would know no difference; we are quite out of sight of the bridge.'

He now stepped into the bed of the stream, and pushed hard on a projecting boulder, which turned on its side, disclosing a dark tunnel.

'Follow me,' he said, 'and mind your footing.'

I followed him into the tunnel, where he struck a match, showing rugged walls, apparently a natural passage enlarged and roughly hewn out, ending in a flight of rough steps cut in the living rock. Up these we passed, and emerged at the top into the famous secret Gipsy Glen.

Faa Simpson pressed down a long iron lever beside the top of the stair, and almost immediately the water was again rushing over the crag and dashing into the pool more than twenty feet below us. The gipsies' front door was again locked.

'That is the celebrated secret,' he said; 'I have trusted you with it because I like you, and because I was ordered to; yet I don't know that it was much of a confidence, after all. We have always scouts outside, and no man would have leisure to move the lever at the bottom before we should turn him out; and even if he had all day I doubt if you or anyone, without special instruction, could find

the lever under the fall; and then, even if he did and turned the water off, there is still the opening of the tunnel to find, and when he has found that, men can only come in in a single line; and suppose a squad of police or gaugers were to try and force our fortress, we have only to turn this lever you see here, and flood the tunnel, and all our enemies would be drowned like rats in a trap. I think you will admit that our defences are fairly complete.'

'Extraordinarily so,' I said. 'But tell me: you spoke once or twice of what you were ordered to do; was it by the original of the picture?'

'You may think so if you like,' he answered; 'I have no permission to say. Come on—sir!' Again that slight pause. 'You are my guest; let me do the honours of Gipsy Glen properly.'

It was a wild and altogether strange scene, such as one would scarcely believe could be found in this country. Precipitous cliffs on either side rising sheer from the greensward enclosed a cañon, which extended, with slight windings, for about a quarter of a mile, the farther end being blocked by a perpendicular wall of rock, down which rushed a second magnificent waterfall of fully fifty feet in height. It was a natural entrenchment, formed, so far as I could judge, by the action of the stream, through the course of ages, cutting itself a passage through the soft stone; while the two masses of hard old red sandstone, which was almost like adamant, were left, forming, as it were, two monstrous steps as of the beginning of a giant's staircase, which were the waterfalls above and below. This may be geologi-

cally all wrong; I only give it as my impression at the moment.

The stream ran swiftly down the midst of this cañon, about three yards across, and fairly deep; green turf was on either side, studded with stunted bushes and a few rowans, but evidently, even in summer, the sunlight was short at the bottom of this cleft, and not much would grow; there seemed to be some splendid old trees at the top of the cliffs, whose branches we could see against the sky.

Among the bushes on the banks of the stream were gipsy huts and tents here and there of the regular gipsy type. It was with a sudden catch of the breath that I saw, at the entrance to a tent of a rather better appearance than most of them, the figure of a tall, graceful girl, who instantly suggested Morag to my mind. There she is, I said to myself, making an instinctive quick step forwards. A chill wave of disappointment came over me as she turned —merely a beautiful gipsy-brown skin, coal-black hair, sparkling eyes, and the whitest teeth, an attractive personality enough, but *not* Morag.

'Esther,' said my companion, 'this is the Georgio. 'Have I your permission'—turning to me—'to say a word to my sister in Romany?'

'Of course; pray don't apologize,' I said, feeling the instinctive delicacy and good manners of the request, in strong contrast with those of sundry great ladies, who had not scrupled to address each other in Hindustani slang before me, unconscious of the fact that the sense, at any rate, of their not very polite conversation was quite plain to me. A

rapid exchange of a word or two, and then the girl came forward greeting me kindly, if somewhat distantly. She held in her hand the same copy of the pastel drawing that her brother, if such he was, had shown me three days before. Along with this she held a letter; my pulses were flying in eager anticipation. Faa Simpson had withdrawn himself, still with that instinctive courtesy of his race, and the girl handed me the letter. My pulses closed their gates in keen disappointment, as when I first saw that she was not *my* Morag. The letter was dated five years back.

She held it out to me, and I took and read it, though at first with little interest. It ran thus:

'DEAREST ESTHER, SWEET FOSTER-SISTER,

'I send you in this a copy of that drawing you always said was so like me, and which you wanted so much to have. I have had this facsimile made specially for you by the new process. I fear me I shall not long look like that. I am becoming a terrible invalid, my dear! Isn't it hard luck? My eyes are so troublesome now; they won't let me read or paint or work—not that I ever was much of a worker, as you know; hardly even now may I swim, except on the warmest of summer days when the water is calm. Fancy that for her whom you called "the seal" so often, who was more at home in the water than on shore! And so I dream and dream. They say I have the sight, you know. It may be so; anyhow, my dreams get more vivid as I do less, and I feel sure that some day you will bring me the

Prince Charming who will change all my life. So clearly last night I saw the dear old Dower House as it was, and went to play in the old castle, in the place where you and I found the secret hiding-place, where the records were, and where we always dreamed there was a hidden treasure. Don't tell any human soul of this till I give you leave; I am certain I shall be guided to see the one who will use it faithfully, and bring us back to our own. Meantime, I cling to the old prophecy, you know—

> "When the town of the King on the King's point stands,
> The Camerons shall win back their lands."

Good-bye, dear little sister. May Ængus, our own Celtic God of Love, bring you your heart's desire, and lead you at last to Tir nan Oig!

'Ever and ever your own loving

'MORAG.'

I read this letter with strangely mingled feelings.

'Why do you show me this?' I said at length.

'She and I were dearer to each other than twin sisters,' answered the gipsy-girl; 'but for long we have not seen one another. About a week ago, or less, I thought she came to me in a dream and told me I was to send for you, and she held this letter in her hand, which I have cherished ever since I got it, and her picture: these were to be my credentials to gain your confidence. Now let me say only one thing. Don't trust my brother overmuch; he is devoted to me, but he was very jealous of my love for Morag, and I fear the Bradleys have led him

astray. He will do anything for me, but when I am away from him I am afraid for him ; he is vain, as all we gipsies are, and the Bradleys are clever. No more now ; when you come again here I shall be able to tell you more.'

Faa Simpson was moving impatiently at our long colloquy. She whistled a quaint call, and said a word out loud in Romany ; he came up at once.

'Well,' he said, 'have I fulfilled my promise ?'

'Amply,' I answered.

'Then I pray you to trust the poor Romany. A promise is sacred in our eyes. And now for the moment I have the honour to welcome you as my guest ; you will not refuse to break bread with us.'

He held up the curtain of the tent and I passed in ; as I did so I felt a midge sting on the back of the neck, but took no account of it at the time.

The tent within was luxuriously fitted. The ground, beaten smooth as a floor, was covered with waterproof sheeting, on which lay a rich carpet. A couple of chairs stood near the entrance, but were evidently more for state than use ; they seemed never to have been used. All round were soft cushions and gay rugs ; at the back of the tent the inevitable brazier on which a kettle was steaming, and on a low stool beside it a tea-tray furnished with excellent china. Esther threw herself in a graceful attitude on a pile of cushions, and began to make tea ; determined to make myself at home, I squatted on a low divan opposite to her, while Faa Simpson brought me tea and cakes.

'Next time you visit us I'll have something more

substantial to offer you,' he said: 'a young rabbit, or a grouse, maybe.'

'Poaching?' I said, with a smile, to indicate what was the fact, indeed—that I myself had snared a rabbit or so before now.

The gipsy's eyes twinkled; he saw my meaning and acquiesced, though in words he said:

'Well, you see, I'm a gamekeeper, so it's not exactly poaching; one gets the rabbit, but one misses the fun of dodging the keepers.'

'You still dodge the customs, though,' I said.

'The gaugers—oh yes; but they haven't an idea of our work. Do you know, we had a gauger in here once years ago; we made blinds to make them think we were brewing here—burnt kipper and such-like; they thought it was to hide the smell of whisky, and came up over the moor, a lot of them; we lay quiet as mice; presently they dropped a rope; still we took no notice; and they lowered a man down, and then another. Then we thought there were enough here for our accommodation, so one of our chaps cut the rope; they never saw him, and couldn't make out what had happened. Then we escorted the two that had come down through every house and tent in the glen, let them see every mortal thing, convinced them that we couldn't make a wine-glassful of spirit here, blindfolded them, and took them out through the tunnel; never unbandaged them till we got them a mile away from the glen; then two of our chaps went up to the moor, and told their friends where they would find them. Oh, it was a rare bit of fun!'

Strange was it for me to find myself thus hob-nobbing in the friendliest way with these gipsies, and, sooth to say, I enjoyed it, apart altogether from the prominent fact that here now obviously lay one certain method of communicating with my darling Morag.

The time was come to take my leave. Faa Simpson preceded me out of the tent. I found a moment in saying good-bye to say to Esther:

'Tell me, where is Miss Morag now?'

'The very thing I wanted to ask you. I have no idea; I see her only in dreams.'

Suddenly she looked me straight in the eyes; a change came over her; she spoke as if in a dream, and without volition:

'You were swimming the other day; go and swim again to-morrow. Morag the Seal says, "Come!"'

Hurriedly I pressed her hand and followed Faa Simpson, who guided me back the same way I had come, past the gipsy tents and huts, where groups of wild, dark-eyed men and women stood respectfully on one side as we passed, and I recognized that my companion's title of King of the Gipsies had some foundation in the feelings of his own tribe, at all events.

As the water rushed down the cliff again after we had emerged from the tunnel, I was startled at hearing the cry of a curlew close to my head. I turned in quick surprise, to see the gipsy grinning amusedly over my shoulder, and in an instant the cry was answered from two distant points.

'All right,' he said; 'come on—sir; it's all safe.

It is our rule to not go out after the front door has been opened until we hear the countersign from the sentinels. The watchword is constantly changed; it happens to be the curlew to-day.'

'Do you imitate every bird as exactly as the curlew, then?' I queried.

'Look up at that tree,' he said; and on the instant an old crow squawked beside my ear. I started and looked round; the imitation was perfect. The gipsy laughed lightly. 'It is part of our earliest training,' he said; 'every Romany in the glen can do that—not only every bird, but all the beasts of the hill side.' I thought of the weird cries of night-birds that I had heard, and held my peace.

At the bridge I parted from the gipsy, feeling certainly that I knew him better; and, strange as it may seem, though I felt even greater distrust of him, I could not help a kind of liking for the queer, wild, picturesque scoundrel, with his curious courtesy and delicacy of feeling, his theatrical vanity, his obvious utter unscrupulousness.

'Good-bye,' he said. 'I think you will come again in three days or so; welcome whenever you like to pay us a visit. See here: whenever you want to see me, blow this.' He handed me a curiously formed wooden whistle. I blew it, and was startled at the sound, which was a precise imitation of a wood-pigeon's coo. 'If I'm at home and all's safe, I shall never fail to answer that. Good-bye.'

It still wanted an hour to dinner-time. I thought I would walk along and see the doctor before going up to the house to dress.

The doctor's trap stood by the little green gate, and the doctor himself was hurrying down the short gravel path looking preoccupied, and with the air of a man late for an important appointment. Immediately he saw me his face lighted up with a distinct expression of relief as he came out into the road to greet me.

'You can't think how glad I am to see you, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said. 'I am in terrible perplexity, and I do want your legal brain badly.'

'What's the matter?' I queried.

'Oh, the very auld mischief,' he said, relapsing for a moment into the Lowland vernacular; 'and, indeed, I don't know what I shall have to do. Come and walk up the road a bit, and I'll tell you. My patient, the wee loonie, you know, has been getting steadily better, and more able to speak connectedly. You will remember the few disjointed words that he spoke at first. These were sufficiently discomposing. But last night he was able to speak quite plainly, and with full memory, so far as I could tell, and it's an awful story. I daren't try now to tell you what it is, for I might misinterpret it, and it's too serious; not to be told in a hurry, either; but if I'm right it means a criminal charge.'

'Have you told Sir John?' I asked.

'No,' he replied; 'and that's just a point. I would give worlds to tell my old friend and hear from him that it's all nonsense, or, at worst, to give him the cue to get out of the way; but I fear the accusation involves him and his brother.'

I suppose I started slightly, and the doctor continued :

'You may well be surprised ; it is incredible. I feel it is so unutterably mean to keep it from him ; and yet if I were to warn him and let him escape I should be compounding a felony, bringing worse trouble on numbers of innocent folk.'

'You can't do that,' I said. 'After all, if he is innocent, this accusation, whatever it is, can be easily disproved. Is it so very terrible ?'

'Terrible !' cried the doctor—'terrible, do you say ! Murder, man, or attempted murder, and forgery, and that's only part of it ; it is the most horrible story I ever heard, and I've heard a good many.'

'Clearly, then, it is not a thing in which you or I could safely meddle ; we must have the authorities behind us : that's my first advice.'

'Which I have already acted on. I sent to the Fiscal last night, late as it was, to ask him to come and take the little man's evidence ; but, as ill-luck would have it, he was away in the islands, and can't possibly get back till the day after to-morrow. They got a wire to him, but there's no boat.'

'That's all right then,' I said ; 'he'll be here before anything untoward can happen, and meantime you have the little man safe. I suppose your people can be relied on not to say anything ?'

'Oh, perfectly ; but it's an awful responsibility, Mr. Kingsburgh, and I want you to promise to come round when the Fiscal comes. I shall need advice and help badly. Come to-morrow about tea-time,

if you can. I want a talk with you, and you're not looking very first-rate yourself somehow. I'll give you a tonic, but, anyhow, come the day after without fail.'

'All right,' I said. 'Good-bye, doctor; don't worry too much over this job. I dare say it will turn out not so very serious, after all.'

So we parted, and he jumped into his trap and drove off, while I returned leisurely to the house to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XIV

CERTAINLY the doctor was right. I was greatly out of condition—tired and languid, and wanting in initiative in a way wholly new to me. Sir John noticed it, and I am bound to say that nothing on earth could exceed his kindness and solicitude.

'You have been overworking, Mr. Kingsburgh. I fear the selfishness of age has made me neglectful of your interests, and your kindly enthusiasm over these tiresome affairs of mine has led you to overtax your strength. Our West Highland air is enervating to Southerners, and I have often noticed, when visitors from the South come among us, they usually need a good spell of idleness before they can brace themselves to do their normal work. You must follow their example; give yourself a holiday; ramble over the hills, if you like, or lie on the heather and dream, or swim in the sea, or take my boat out and catch some fish; do what you like, and the doctor shall give you a tonic. Oh, we will soon have you as strong and hearty as any Highlander in the West.'

Sir John would not hear of any work that evening; he was the courteous host; he seemed to lay himself out to entertain me. He told most interesting stories

of his travels, and he appeared to have been everywhere ; and he described most racily and graphically the manners and customs of many out-of-the-way races and peoples, illustrating his tales with photographs and souvenirs of the most strange and outlandish descriptions. I was frankly fascinated, and do what I might I could not square this kindly cultured gentleman with the unmentionable criminal of whom the doctor's tale of his patient warned me. Then, also, there was Esther the gipsy, who attributed her brother's lapse from what she held gipsy honour to his intercourse with the Bradleys ; and Morag, *my* Morag, too, had showed the gravest concern at my staying with one of the Bradley brothers ; she always lumped them together, by the way.

Morag's attitude towards them weighed with me more than all the rest put together. Yet there was my host sitting before me, and it seemed wholly impossible to co-ordinate the ideas, and for the moment I was content to assume that there must be some mistake, and that Sir John was really the kind friend and blameless country gentleman seeking merely to establish his rights that he appeared to be.

I was early to bed that night. Sir John was never a late sitter, and I was, I confess, tired and very sleepy. Yet when I got to bed I did not sleep at first ; my body seemed utterly weary, but my mind strangely active, and, after my usual and inveterate habit, I was analysing the clues I had got to the problems that bewildered me. Naturally, my visit

to the Gipsy Glen occupied the first place in my thoughts; several new points were now clear from this. In the first place, I had identified the gipsy girl; and whatever Morag might be, or Esther, at all events they were two separate persons. Esther was charming and delightful, but she was not Morag: that was certain. Then Esther might, perhaps, have the hypnotic powers that the doctor had spoken of, and might have caused me to fancy that I saw things which I did not, in fact, see. This seemed the only way in which hypnotism could now enter into the question, and it was not exactly convincing, for, however, I looked at it, I could scarcely conceive myself to have been deluded into fancying the experiences I had gone through. If this were so, then we must assume that Esther was the inventor and creator of Morag, and this was unthinkable. To have merely imagined and brought to the imagination of another person that delicious and bewitching personality with any medium of prose or poetry or paint, or even dramatic art, would stamp her as an artist worthy to stand beside Shakespeare's self. But without any of these aids to create and bring visibly and tangibly before me in a presentment so vivid as to deceive me into the belief, the conviction, of its reality, a wholly fictitious creation of the brain was incredible. 'Nonsense,' I said to myself; 'I have held Morag in my arms; my kisses are warm on her lips. If she is not a living and breathing reality, then neither am I.'

The problem still remained, however, granted that Morag was living and breathing, who was she?

Where did she live? It was only moved a stage farther back. Esther might throw some light on this, though apparently Esther did not know more than I did where Morag was, or where she lived; she rather assumed that her foster-sister was far away; she had not seen her for long, but within a week Morag had come to her in a dream and told her to show me the letter. Then the letter itself, taken together with the letters quoted by Mrs. MacCulloch, seemed beyond all question to identify Morag whom I knew with Miss Morag Cameron, the heiress of Ard na Righ; for such she was, if there was any flaw in the loan transaction whereon Sir John's title was founded.

Yet, again, so persistently worked my mind round and round the same old point, how came Morag Cameron to be here unknown to her friend Mrs. MacCulloch, with whom she was in close and frequent correspondence, unknown to her foster-sister, Esther Simpson the gipsy?

Again, Esther's words identified Morag Cameron and *my* Morag with Morag the Seal. True, this might be a bit of play-acting, though I could ill believe that my gracious, gentle Morag had ever compassed the death of that poor boy who was found drowned on the shore. But setting all this aside, how could a young lady, with all the conventional belongings of mother and sisters, and a home and friends, contrive to perform such a comedy alone, in a district where she had been brought up and was well known to very many of the people. This, too, was unthinkable.

So went my thoughts round and round, and hardly I realized where I was. I seemed almost lost and floating in a flood of moonlight, seeking for Morag. Suddenly I saw her. The moon was shining in through the window opposite my bed, and silhouetted against the pale radiant sky was the form of Morag, standing, as I now saw, on the fragment of wall opposite the window, and close by the little door leading into the castle. Now I would solve everything; she was come to me; I would slip out of the window as I had done before—perhaps that friendly ladder was there still—and join her. She would tell me the whole story, and all mystery should be cleared. I lay motionless, gazing at Morag. Had it been to save my life, to save her, to do anything on earth however urgent, I could not have moved; I lay absolutely paralysed, wide awake, fully conscious, but not a limb, not a finger even, would obey the dictate of my will. Again and again I strove hard to break the uncanny chain, even to close my eyes for one moment. I felt if I could but blink I could shake it off, but every muscle, every nerve, was held in a grip of iron. I suppose I must have breathed, but even of this I was unconscious; to myself I seemed a living soul looking out through the eyes of a dead body; then suddenly, like the turning off of electric light, the whole scene vanished into utter darkness, and with the darkness came oblivion.

Sleep I suppose it was; at any rate, I knew nothing more till the footman came to call me in the morning, nor did I perceive any abnormal symptoms; save a

slight headache and a feeling of stiff neck, I was just as usual.

It was a glorious summer morning ; I jumped out of bed to luxuriate in my cold tub. The fragment of wall where I had seen Morag the night before looked as ordinary and commonplace as a fragment of wall can look in the clear, uncompromising light of a summer morning.

The thing was quite plain. I was run down, overtired, relaxed with the unaccustomed soft, enervating air, and I had had a touch of nightmare.

Well, I was going for a swim this afternoon. The gipsy's message recurred to my mind ; perhaps—nay, probably—that was all a delusion or fantasy. No matter ; I should go and swim anyhow—that, at least, was a genuine delight—and clear away the cobwebs. Also, I would take full advantage of Sir John's kindness, and allow myself a few days' complete rest. After all, whether he were a scoundrel, as the doctor would have me believe, or not, he could not intend any evil against me. I was too valuable to him. It was by my aid he was to establish his title. When I came to think of it, there was ample reason for his kindness and care of me ; putting it on the lowest footing, he needed me, and no sane man injures wantonly one who is essential to his plans. In that lay my safety, however great a scoundrel he might be ; and secure in this reflection, I felt I could afford to not greatly care for the present whether he were a scoundrel or not.

Rather a cynical view, perhaps, but before you blame me I would have you remember that Sir John

and all his works and ways were but secondary objects to me. It was a professional job, in the doing of which I was possibly incurring a certain amount of danger, and decidedly working out a most fascinating problem. But the main and supreme interest of my whole being was Morag. Here I had come in contact with a wholly new experience, and strenuously as I said to myself over and over again that Morag was a real living and breathing reality, yet in my inmost soul I knew very well that it was not such a reality as I had ever known before. Every time I had met her it was with somewhat of a a suggestion of unreality, despite the extraordinary vividness of the sensations, and I had never seen her in company with any living person whom I knew. In fact, at the sound of Sandy Macpherson's gun, she had vanished completely, almost out of my very arms. I tried to imagine introducing her to the doctor, or the doctor presenting her to me, but fancy for once refused her office; the thing seemed unthinkable; the two memories would not go together. I tried hard to force imagination, in the hope that a solution of the puzzle would somehow present itself intuitively; but the utmost I could picture to myself was Morag lying on a sofa in a small room, pale, languid, and ill, and the doctor bending over her as I had seen him at patients' bedsides; also the glorious eyes were persistently closed; by no stretch of imagnation could I see them open.

So I mused and dreamed on the white painted garden bench in front of the house. Sir John resolutely refused to allow me to do any work. I had

done already as much as he could digest, he said; I must give him time to provide me with new matter, and then we could co-ordinate all we had done, and make a perfect case.

In one sense, then, Morag was to me still a phantom, but a phantom that I felt certain had somewhere a real living counterpart, and this counterpart, be it a flesh and blood maiden or the weird, uncanny seal-woman of legend lore, I was determined to reach and to find.

In this strange West Highland country the people dreamed, and, unlike the Sassenach, they dreamed true; they saw ghosts, and learned things of material import to them to know; they had the sight, and could foretell the future sometimes. Had the same spirit come on me? At all events, I could not resist the impulse. I murmured to myself poor Adam Lindsay Gordon's words:

> 'When I well nigh swooned in the deep-drawn bliss
> Of that first long sweet, slow, shuddering kiss,
> I had gladly given, for less than this,
> Myself and my soul's salvation.'

And with these lines in my mind, I fell sound asleep as suddenly as unconsciousness follows a blow on the head. When I woke I found Sir John's hand on my shoulder; he was looking down on me kindly, yet half amusedly, I thought.

'Wake up, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said; 'you have had a sound and I trust a refreshing sleep for a couple of hours, and now it is lunch-time.'

I sat up and shook myself; the drowsiness had entirely passed off.

After lunch I gathered my bathing kit and walked down to the shore. I had no very great belief in the gipsy-girl's message ; I thought it might well be a trap of some sort, for, sooth to say, I did not trust any of the gipsies very much ; still, there was always a fascination for me in a swim, and after my long sleep in the morning I needed some sort of bracing. I walked along the shore to the cave I had bathed from before, looking with some eagerness all along the shining sands, but not a creature of any sort was in sight. I felt sure this would be so, yet so unreasonable a creature is man that I could not help a wave of disappointment. My swim seemed now to have lost its zest, and to have become merely a tame and rather uninteresting way of getting rid of a dull afternoon. However, there was nothing else to do, and I languidly got into my bathing-suit, and plunged off a white rock into the glittering sapphire water.

I swam round the first point immediately on my left hand as I faced the sea ; here a pinnacle of rock rose some eight or ten feet above the water. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of something brown on its summit ; a flash through the air ; something glided with hardly a sound or splash smoothly into the depths of the sea not far from me ; clusters of gleaming bubbles rose, flashing rainbow tints like a coronal of bridal jewels ; and even while I still looked in amazement, wondering what it might be, lo ! Morag swam beside me. Never had I seen her look so superbly beautiful, so gloriously alive as then ; the whole mass of her magnificent hair

was loose, and floated behind her as she swam with the long, steady stroke of the practised swimmer; her bathing-dress was some sort of brown, and I could well realize how it was that Esther had called her Morag the Seal.

'Isn't this glorious!' she said. 'Oh, Ralph, we are alive at last, you and I here in our own element! The dear sea—don't you love every wave, every ripple of it?'

'I never loved it as I do now,' I replied with the fullest conviction.

'Yet you are a born swimmer too, and you have done Leander's swim. Oh, how I wish I could swim there when the Eastern moonlight gleams on the Dardanelles.'

'Some day perhaps we may,' I said. 'Would you come, Morag?'

'With you, Ralph, anywhere! Say, shall we race to that rock? There's such a lovely pool just below it; it's worth swimming under water to see the splendid colours of it.'

'All right; we're just level now. Are you ready? One, two, three, off!'

I felt more like a boy than I had done for twenty years; the spirit of play and rivalry was strong within me, as when in boyhood's days I had swum races with the boys and girls who were my contemporaries and companions, and beat them easily, too, be it said; for this was the one thing which always I could do better than others, and which I loved with an exceeding devotion. Never till now had I met anyone not professional who could compete with

me in the water on equal terms. Morag swam easily beside me. I was keeping well within myself. Strong swimmer as she was, I was not going to be beaten by a woman, and I reserved my strength for a spurt at the end; yet I was amazed at the ease with which she kept up to what was a fairly fast pace for an amateur.

She laughed lightly as a tiny curling wave kissed her lips and the spray dashed into her eyes. 'I think the dear sea pets me because I love it so,' she said. 'Ralph, you swim well, and oh, how few can! Look, there's our rock; now for it; catch me if you can!'

Supple and sinuous, she drew away from me, scarcely seeming to quicken her stroke. I put forth my utmost efforts to attain my top speed, and came level with her. She turned on her side; one white arm flashed in the air, the hands drawing her along as though grasping the rungs of a ladder, her head cleaving through the laughing waves. As well try to follow a salmon in its rush to the sea. I laboured heavily along, and reached the rock as she perched on a white limestone ridge, dangling her rosy toes in the blue water.

'It wasn't fair a bit,' she said. 'You are really ever so much a better swimmer, and a stronger one, too, than I am, or ever shall be; it was just a little trick of pace. I'll show it you in a few minutes, and then you will beat me easily. But I have won many races by that little trick, only you know it can't be kept up; you may do it for twenty or thirty yards. *You* might perhaps do it for fifty, but then you'd be done.'

I had perched beside her. There we sat; I couldn't help thinking how like two seals we actually were, side by side on that lonely limestone rock out in the midst of those western waves.

It was a fairylike scene, so lovely as scarcely to seem real. The brilliant afternoon sunshine shimmered over the little dancing waves, breaking the pale turquoise with shivered lances of silver; tiny islets were dotted here and there of various colours, like quaint flowers that had fallen from some fairy's basket; afar on the horizon the heat-mist lay, so that the eye often failed to strike that faint line, but wandered from the water to the sky without any consciousness of a break, and scanned the cloudlets for more fairy islands. Down below our feet the pure white ocean floor gleamed through the green waters —limestone and the snowy sand that is made from the ruin of limestone cliffs—and it seemed to throb and pulsate as the little waves broke the sun's rays, looking shallow, almost as if you could put an arm down and pick a shell from the bottom.

'Twelve feet deep here,' said Morag; 'I've dived it often. The pool I told you of is the other side. Can't you fancy the wind and the sea are lovers, murmuring to each other till they are half asleep, lulled by the sound of their own sweet words?'

She looked at me as she spoke, with the wonderful gleam in her great brown eyes that tugs a man's heart, and my arms went out to clasp her; but she gave a quick turn.

'You must catch me first.'

And I grasped nothing—but a gleam of brown slid

into the clear, transparent water, and I saw the cloud of coppery chestnut hair spread out like a mass of seaweed between me and the white rock of the bottom.

In an instant I was after her. I could swim under water like a fish, and never wanted to close my eyes ; it was my favourite diversion on sunny days to look through the water and see the lines of golden rays playing and intersecting in a rare network, till I could fancy the palaces of the ocean lords laid open before me, and their lovely mermaid daughters sporting among the coral reefs and over the golden sands. So through the veil of the golden-green waters I saw and pursued that lithe brown form. She was right ; it was fully twelve feet deep, and at the bottom was a sort of buttress of the rock scooped into a natural arch ; under this she dived, I after her, and as she turned to rise to the surface I caught her, and hand-in-hand we rose to the air and sunshine again.

'Fairly caught, Morag !'

'Fairly, Ralph ! It is useless for poor little me to struggle ; you would catch me and hold me always. Oh, what children we are ! and how good it is to play ! Really, one only grows old and stupid because one does serious things, and pretends that they matter, and they really don't, you know. Now come round to the other side of the rock and see my pool, and then we'll swim back to shore and talk a bit.'

We scrambled over the rock, and through the clear, sunlighted waters on the farther side we could

see how the ocean floor sloped down on all sides to a sort of deep basin that looked dark and mysterious beside the sunlit white limestone.

'Darest thou follow me there, O my knight of the waters?' she cried, as she poised for an instant preparing for the plunge.

'Anywhere I follow you, Morag,' I answered.

'Then try to reach the bottom. I've only once come near it, never touched it. Are you ready? Off!'

Down she sped like a brown flash, I after her, striking out downwards as hard as I could; harder and harder grew the effort, but I held on. I passed Morag; one more tremendous stroke, and my extended hand touched the bottom. My fingers closed on a stone. I grasped it, and, turning, bore my prize to the surface. Morag was right; the colours were more splendidly sumptuous than anything I ever saw in my life; as I shot upwards, the gold and green of the waters, the white and orange and rosy rocks that gleamed through them, the gorgeous hues of the seaweed that streamed in all directions, waving on the weak currents that were just enough to keep their banners outspread; and all growing clearer and clearer as I came nearer to the surface. As I emerged and clung breathless and dripping to a point of rock, I looked all round for Morag; she was nowhere visible; had my seal indeed vanished into the abysses of the waters? A chill apprehension swept over me. The thought of life without Morag suddenly presented itself; then I heard a light laugh from the top of the rock; she had scrambled up on the farther side.

'You have won,' she said, 'as you will always win, Ralph! You have brought me what I could never get for myself, often as I have tried.'

'You mean this,' I said, as I opened my hand; I had forgotten the stone. It was a piece of pure white marble, shaped like the Bruce heart, or Queen Mary's brooch, as it is sometimes called, with the pointed end turned to the right. How it came there I know not; whether it were by some freak of nature that it was worn into this shape, or whether it had been so carved by mortal hand and dropped there, heaven only knows how long ago.

'That is it,' she said. 'How many a time I have seen it and wanted it, and tried so hard to get it, for I always believed it would be the bringer of great luck to me; and I never could, and now you have brought it to me.'

'As I will bring you every good, Morag,' I said.

Side by side we swam to the shore. As we neared my cave she said:

'There is your dressing-room, Ralph; mine is round the corner. Don't be long; we have had our play; now we must talk a little; there are many things to say.'

I dressed rapidly, and walked along the shore; round the point was Morag waiting for me, with her arms stretched out in the most enchanting attitude a woman can assume. One long, close embrace marked the end of our playtime, the beginning of our serious consultation, if such it were to prove. I led her to a rocky seat, where a tangle of dry seaweed made a soft cushion over the smooth

limestone rock, and there, with my arm round her waist, and her dainty little head resting where it belonged, we entered on our long-promised and deferred talk.

'What a day it has been, Ralph!' she said.

'Is it just one day out of a life, Morag, or the beginning of all the days that are to be?'

'Be it what you will,' she replied. 'In life or death I am yours now, yours to do what you will with, comrade or slave or lover, as it seems good to you, happy so only that I can make your happiness.'

'Will you then really come to me, my Morag—come as my gracious queen, whom I will serve with my latest breath?'

'I will,' she half whispered, 'only too gladly.'

'But tell me now, sweet mystery! how shall I find you—you who are as elusive as the sun-gleams on the water; you who live here, there, or nowhere. I am, alas! a child of earth. Can I tame my sweet wild sea-mew? Tell me, Morag, where you live, where I can find you, whence I can take you?'

'Where I live?' she said. 'What shall I say to you, Ralph? I live everywhere, nowhere. The old Dower House—they tell me that was burnt; we have made another house exactly like the one we used to live in. I'll take you there; you have seen it already where we first met; then sometimes I am at the Gipsy Glen, and here and there. Oh, I don't know where I live. But do you know, Ralph, how I dream? and in my dreams I am far more a stationary conventional person than I am really. For it is always the same. I dream I am an invalid

lying on a sofa mostly, and a doctor comes to see me, and I am not allowed to do anything, not even to swim, and, worse than all, my eyes are always shut. I never see anything, but I seem to know it is all poor and uncomfortable, and that there are others who have to work for me, and I can do nothing. Oh, it is such a cruel dream, and I am so glad to wake and to come back to you, and, above all, to swim in the dear sea.'

At that moment I heard the sound of a voice. Quick as thought Morag turned. My arm slipped from her waist; before I could realize what had happened she was gone. A man's voice came from the other side of the rock against which we had been resting. I could not identify it, yet I seemed to have heard it before somewhere.

'He came down here to bathe, and now he has gone, and no trace of him on the sea. If he is drowned, it would save much trouble. If there were any sense in that ridiculous story, I suppose one would say he had met Morag the Seal. Anyhow, he's gone; so much the better for you. But mind, if he turns up again, you know what you have to do.'

'And what I will never do,' said another voice, which I recognized; it was that of Faa Simpson, the gipsy. 'He has broken bread and salt with me, and a gipsy's honour is more sacred than any of your cursed Georgio oaths.'

'You are insolent, fellow,' said the first speaker. 'Remember, I hold you body and soul; I have got all I needed out of this man, and now he knows too

much. He must go the same way as the others; you understand? This is the last one. In a few months now, if you are faithful to me, you are independent for the rest of your life, a rich man, and able to do what you like. If not, you hang. You know I have the power, and you know I never threaten in vain.'

'I know it all,' replied the voice of the gipsy; 'you can hang me, perhaps; you know quite enough, and you are wicked enough; folk will believe you, and they won't believe me, though you deserve far more hanging than I do; but hang me or not, this thing I will not do—Mr. William Bradley!'

So the speakers passed out of hearing.

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poor room with a doctor in attendance, and her eyes persistently closed. Yet never thus had I known her, and to-day least of all, when she was radiant with health and strength, and full of the spirit of play and mischief and gaiety, suffused throughout with the glow of a love so intense that I grew almost afraid when I thought of it, so strange did it seem that anything so wonderful should in fact have come to me.

As I mused I passed the doctor's gate, and, remembering my promise, turned in and rang the bell. He came himself to the door and greeted me.

'I am keeping the strictest watch till to-morrow,' he said, 'that no one gets access to my patient. Either Mrs. MacCulloch or I open the door, and allow no one to pass except those we know and trust. Come in, come in! I want to tell you a queer thing; you are interested in our Western second sight and all that line of country; well, here's something I can't quite account for: I have a patient a good way off, up the glen, a poor woman suffering from chronic indigestion. I gave her a course of medicine, and then I stupidly forgot the day that she would come to an end of it, when I remembered it was impossible for me to go that way. The carrier was passing and going up the glen, and taking some parcels for me; so I just scribbled a note to this poor woman to brew herself some dandelion tea, and take it every two hours; it was not exactly what I was going to give her, but it would do, and was the best I could do under the circumstances. Well, I thought no more about it till this morning,

when I found the note in my blotting-book. I had written it, and never given it to the carrier. You may imagine I was put out, and I made a special long round to-day on purpose to see that poor woman. Well, directly I got inside the door she began thanking me for the dandelion tea. "What on earth do you mean?" said I; "how did you hear of dandelion tea?" "Why, from yourself, doctor dear," she said, "when you came here four days ago." "I wasn't here then," said I. "Oh yes, you were," she said; "just about four in the afternoon; you came in in a great hurry, and stood just where you are standing now, and told me to brew some dandelion tea, and take it every two hours; and I remember especially," she said, "I noticed a gold cross on your watch-chain." Well, I make a point of not contradicting a patient unless it's necessary, so I just said, "Oh, well, I suppose I had forgotten; anyhow, it is exactly the right thing." And I came away. It happened I was wearing a little gold cross given me by an old patient. I had put it on for the first time.'

'But, doctor,' I said, 'isn't that just the same sort of thing as your own experience with the native doctor?'

'By Jove! so it is. It's queer, though; I never had exactly that sort of experience before.'

'Tell me about your patient,' I said; 'what was this extraordinary story that he told you?'

'Not a word!' he said. 'I'm not going to say one solitary thing until the Fiscal comes, and that will be to-morrow morning. It's too big a job for me.

I know how easy it would be to make a mess of it, and if a mess is to be made I prefer that it should be some one else's. If the Fiscal and the authorities make a mess, no one can blame me. But come, now, Mr. Kingsburgh, I told you I would give you a tonic, and, by George! you look as if you needed it. Come into the consulting-room for a moment while I see what's the matter with you.' The good doctor began with the usual rather perfunctory professional glance, which almost at once quickened into interest wherein I could see a certain trace of apprehension. 'Come over to the light here—so; look straight at that point; now stand quite still, raise your right hand, and point to the top of the tree out there. Ah! your nerves are a bit badly shaken, though some temporary excitement has braced them; it is dying away now, and unless you get something you will be very tired and depressed in an hour or so. Well, we'll prevent that, anyhow. You were complaining a little of stiff neck. Undo your collar; let's see. Hello! Oh, the deuce! what's this? The glands are double their proper size. Can you remember having been bitten by any sort of fly within the last week or two?'

I recalled the midge sting in the Gipsy Glen, repeated on the occasion of my second visit, and told the doctor of it.

'A midge sting in the Gipsy Glen! What on earth were you doing in the Gipsy Glen? Never mind; that's not the point. Could it be the *Glossina?* It seems sheer impossible. And yet I don't know. Anopheles has been seen at Oban; why not

tsetse? There may be other cases like this poor loonie among the gipsies; it was hinted so when the Fiscal was here. By the living Lord, this is awkward! I haven't a drop of the fish antidote for three days yet; however, nothing should develop before that. You'll excuse me, Mr. Kingsburgh, I must just take a drop of your blood for examination, and I'll try a touch of an arsenical preparation; it can't do any harm; turn up your sleeve, please, for a minute.' A tiny prick, and the doctor turned away to his microscope, and spoke not for several minutes. 'I believe your midge must have been that beastly tsetse, though how it got there beats me. If we had been on the Congo among the M'Bula Wamba, I would have been inclined to take another view, but that's no matter. Now then, we must deal with this.' The doctor filled his tiny hypodermic syringe, and deftly injected some preparation selected from the multitude of little bottles above his desk.

'Now, I want you to sit still for a little bit, Mr. Kingsburgh. Take a cigarette, lie back in that chair, and tell me what you have been doing these last few days. I want to know about the Gipsy Glen, and anything else of interest.'

Briefly as I could, I told him the story of my invitation to visit the Gipsy Glen, and of my subsequently going there. I did not, however, tell him the secret of the lock of the gipsies' front door, and I explained why it was a matter of trust.

'I fully understand and respect your scruples, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said, 'though I confess it has

been a puzzle to me for many years, and I must say that I feel a certain jealousy that you should know it now and I don't. Never mind that; what you say interests me enormously; so there, in fact, we have your hypnotist. I have heard of that girl Esther Simpson; she is supposed to have extraordinary powers. At one time when the tribe were on tramp she was their crack fortune-teller. She has suggested Morag the Seal to you.'

I have already stated why this seemed to me impossible, but I could not tell the doctor why I thought so without telling him also of all my intimacy with Morag, and this seemed to be far too intimate and sacred a matter to divulge even to him. 'By the way,' he went on after a pause, 'have you had any more experiences like that in the old Dower House? I think that we must now assume that Esther Simpson probably met you there, or, rather, at the end of the wood-path, and threw you into a hypnotic sleep, in which she described to you the old house as she used to know it, and Morag Cameron as she was, and you saw it. This is quite common; I could make you see queer things without much trouble, I think.'

The doctor's explanations fitted the facts he knew, but I knew others which they didn't fit. One point only I recurred to.

'But, doctor, assuming that this mysterious Morag the Seal is, in fact, a phantom conjured up on the model of Miss Morag Cameron, how comes it that she should be so cruel, the form of a god with the heart of a beast? This does not seem in the least

to describe the prototype. Miss Morag, I understand, is a kindly, gracious lady whom every one loves, and who does good to everybody. What, then, about that poor lad who was drowned ?'

'Oh, as to that, I can tell you something more that I heard only recently. I knew that boy well; he had the sight, and he used to see himself drowned. He was quite convinced he was going to die that way, and he was always deadly afraid of being washed overboard in some heavy storm. I am told that he didn't fear drowning, but he had a morbid horror of battling with stormy waves till he died. I think I told you once before how he raved about a beautiful lady who came and walked beside him, and told him things, and how later he grew morbid and miserable, and said she had left him, and so on. Well, I got hold of his people, and cross-questioned them pretty closely. He used to talk freely enough to an aunt about these things, and it seems his fancy was that this lady, whom he called Morag, always cheered him up, and told him he would be drowned, as he wished to be, in a calm summer sea, with no struggle or pain at all, and he believed her, and was happy. It was all nonsense to say he was in love with her; he looked on her as a sort of angel, or the Blessed Virgin, as he told his aunt once; he was a Catholic, you know. Then there came a strange priest from the South to the little chapel on the hill-side to take Father Maclean's place for a month, and he told the poor boy it was all sinful rubbish to believe such things, and so he got troubled and perplexed, and his old dread came back upon him, and he saw

Morag no more for some time—perhaps because he didn't believe ; I can't say. Then Father Maclean came back from his holiday, and he put it all right again ; and the boy told his aunt that he had a vision of himself with the winding-sheet, dripping wet, swathed round his mouth and chin. But he saw Morag, and she seemed to come to him out of a bright halo, and told him that his time was come, and the summer sea would carry him ever so gently over to where troops of bright angels were waiting to welcome him ; and his mother, whom he had loved more than anything on earth, expected her boy. And he heard the great chorus of the angelic hosts, and his mother's voice as he used to hear her singing in the little chapel on the hillside, and he was quite happy and content. And no one knew how it was that he was drowned ; but anyhow, his aunt was well persuaded that his time had come, and it was well with him, but that daft old Sandy Macpherson never would have it. But later, again, I heard the real story : that evening a small boy from a village about five miles off had strayed along here without leave, and had fallen over the rocks into a pool, and was nearly drowned. This poor boy saw him, and dived after him again and again, and got him up and set him on shore, but fell back himself into the sea, exhausted, I suppose. The little chap ran home, and got a licking for running away, and was afraid to tell what had happened to him, till I got it out of him by chance almost.'

The good doctor had waxed quite poetical over the story of the drowned lad ; I had never heard the

West Highland vein of romance come out so strongly in him.

'Now, Mr. Kingsburgh,' he said, after some minutes of silence, 'you will be all right for the present, I think.' He poured a little colourless liquid into a glass, and filled it with water. 'Drink this, and go back to Airton House; have a light dinner, and, by my advice, go to bed early. The Fiscal is to be here by ten o'clock to-morrow, and I want you to be here as soon as he is. You'll be quite fit after a good night's rest, and when we've done with the Fiscal, I'll see what's best to do for you. It won't do to have you laid up now; we've all got our work before us for the next few weeks, I suspect, either to prove that my old friend Sir John is an innocent man, or to bring him to justice for one of the greatest villains. Well, now, good-bye, Mr. Kingsburgh till to-morrow; I shall need all the clearness of your legal brain to tell me what to do when you have heard what the wee loonie has to tell us.'

So we shook hands and parted at the little white gate, I going back to Airton House to dress for dinner.

Sir John was genial and kindly as usual at dinner, and full of his doings of that afternoon. He had taken his brougham, and driven along the road that skirts Ben na Chat, and with his telescope had seen numbers of deer on the face, some splendid stags, three or four of them royals.

'And I hope you'll be with us to shoot one or two of them as soon as the season comes, Mr. Kingsburgh.

It will be a fine trophy to hang up a royal head in your London chambers, and tell your friends that it was shot on the property that your skill and work had won back for its old lords. I shall be married by that time. Oh yes, I shall marry as soon as you have made my title all perfectly clear. I'm going to marry the Cameron heiress—a beautiful girl, I'm told ; Bradley-Cameron I suppose the name will be under the new entail. You'll have all the settling of that, of course. By Gad, Mr. Kingsburgh ! you must be the godfather of my first boy. Oh, how sick my brother William will be ! Silly ass ! thinking he was going to be the father of the future family !'

Sir John positively chuckled as he talked, but what he said set me thinking. The Cameron heiress could be no other than Morag. Was his idea that he was going to marry her an insane delusion ? or was he scheming to marry some one else in the idea that she was the heiress ? or was my genealogy all wrong ? I must set this doubt at rest at once.

'I fancied you had told me you didn't know the Cameron family,' I said.

'Neither I do ; never saw one of them. I'm going to marry the eldest girl, all the same. Don't you see what a thing it will be for both of us ? The chance for her of getting back the old property and the old home, and having it settled for ever on her children ; and for me the uniting of the two branches of the old house, and putting an end for ever to all heart-burnings and ideas ; for I know, however clearly we prove my title, the Camerons will always

fancy they have some sort of a claim to it. These old Highland families are very tenacious of their claims, and they can't believe in any law or right that would take away the property that their forefathers owned. I quite sympathize, you know ; I feel it myself. All the same, I am glad my forefathers bought it back honestly, instead of seizing it, as our ancestors would have done. Ah ! what's that ?' It was a sudden shrill cry of terror, like that of a hunted hare when she feels the fangs of the dog.

He pointed to a dark spot beside the window curtain. I saw nothing except a chance gleam of light reflected from some mirror or bit of glass. Sir John stared with wide-open eyes.

'No, no !' he cried in a high falsetto voice, 'you shall not scare me. It is nothing—I know there's nothing there. Mr. Kingsburgh, you are sure there's nothing there, aren't you ?'

'I see nothing,' I said ; 'your eyes have deceived you, Sir John. I thought I saw a gleam of light too, but it's nothing.'

'Of course it's nothing,' he said, with an air of relief. 'You never saw a seal's head there, did you ? No, of course you didn't.'

'No, I certainly didn't,' I said.

'There, I knew it was all a delusion—of course it was ; Mr. Kingsburgh says so, and he knows. Foul witch ! so much for your tricks. I'll marry, and see if you dare haunt me then. I beg your pardon, Mr. Kingsburgh ; my mind was running on an old folk-lore tale. I'm a little liable to nerve upsets, you

know ; I'll just take the doctor's draught ; I shall be quite right in half an hour. Would you kindly ring for James ?'

I did so, and at the same time, mindful of the doctor's instructions, I took my leave, intending to get a good night's rest.

'I shall not be long after you, Mr. Kingsburgh,' said Sir John, speaking now quite in his normal tone and manner ; the doctor's potion had evidently done its work. 'I must stay a little while after taking that draught before I go to bed ; the doctor was very particular about that. But don't be in the least anxious about me, my dear friend ; I shall be perfectly right ; besides, my man is with me, and he is accustomed to these slight turns. Oh, they are really nothing at all.'

So we parted, and I went upstairs, but not to sleep. On the contrary, I found myself singularly wakeful. I put on a dressing-gown, and lay down on my bed, taking a book to read till I should feel sleepy enough to turn in for the night.

Of what followed I can only give the plainest and most unvarnished account, for to this day I am unable to explain it, or, indeed, to say whether I was awake, as I seemed to myself to be, and really saw what I imagined, or whether I dreamed it, or saw it in some clairvoyant or second-sight manner. I can only say that to me it seemed that when I had read for perhaps an hour or so I heard Sir John's man going quietly off to bed, which assured me that Sir John was quite recovered, for whenever he was at all ill his man slept in his dressing-room. I was

growing sleepy, and just preparing to turn in myself, when I heard Sir John's voice crying out in great pain or terror. I jumped up hurriedly, and ran downstairs in my dressing-gown as I was. The cry proceeded from the dining-room ; the door was ajar, and there was a pale light something like a faint electric lamp, only that there was no such thing at Airton House. Through the door I saw Sir John, literally cowering down as though to ward off a heavy blow. The light streamed on him from some hidden source, but not long hidden, for I saw, as it were, a luminous glow, like a filmy cloud on which the moonbeams shine, passing up the room toward him, and as it came near the cringing figure I saw that the light seemingly emanated from a figure, and the figure drew near and stood over him, and it was the form and face of Morag, but Morag transfigured, no longer the beautiful playful girl who had challenged me to races in the water ; no longer the sweet, loving maiden who had lain in my arms, and pledged me her troth. It was a stately, majestic woman, grand in the tempest of her indignation and wrath.

Never before, as I have said, had I seen Morag with any person whom I knew as living ; now I did so, though I had parted from Sir John only an hour or so before, and knew him to be real and solid ; yet Morag seemed to me the more real of the two. The baronet had shrunk and faded to an uncomely phantom that I could scarcely believe solid flesh and blood.

'Spare me,' he moaned. 'I have not wronged you or your race. I will restore everything ; I will

marry the heiress of your line, and so it shall come back; if ever there was any wrong done, it was my father's, not mine. Spare me; I will marry—indeed, I will.'

'You will marry!' she said with infinite scorn. 'Do you know that it is I, Morag the Seal, who am the heiress of the Camerons, defrauded of their rights by your lying and your crimes. You will marry me, will you! Often have I warned; now I come for the last time, Sir John Bradley, and it is to tell you that your time is done. The heather on Ben na Chat is budding now; before it blooms you will die as my dear father died by your hand. Yes, look at me; I am Morag the Seal. I was here a hundred years ago as Morag Cameron, and I am here again to-day to defeat the villainy of you and your evil race. You will see me no more, but when your time comes and you die the death you have given to others, then you will remember Morag.'

In a flash she was gone; the light had vanished, and by the pale moonlight that streamed into the room I saw the form of Sir John lying apparently in a dead faint on the floor. I knew, fortunately, where his man slept, and I went and called up the servants' stairs. The man came running down in great haste, and examined his master.

'He's all right, sir,' he said; 'I've often seen him like that after a draught of the doctor's medicine, if he doesn't get to bed at once. And to-night he wouldn't go; he insisted on my going off without seeing him to bed. But I know just what to do;

the doctor showed me. Don't you trouble, sir; he'll be quite right in the morning.'

I have no very clear recollection of going to bed myself, but I woke refreshed and quite myself next morning, only with a clear memory of what I had, or thought I had, seen the night before.

Sir John was absolutely as usual at breakfast; either all I had seen was a delusion, or he had the most marvellous self-control I had ever witnessed in any human being.

I told Sir John I was due at the doctor's; he seemed quite delighted that I should go.

'And when you are there,' he said, 'do try and find out something about that poor little Allan Kerr. I can get nothing out of the doctor; I never knew him so mysterious before about anything. I half suspect he has failed altogether, and, after all that he has said, he is ashamed to tell us so; or else perhaps he has got some wonderful success, and is going to spring it upon us, and bring the little man forward sound and whole to tell us all the story of his kidnapping and all the rest; may heaven grant it is the latter! I believe it would finally crown all the work you and I have done together, Mr. Kingsburgh, if the wee mannie could once speak and tell us all he knows.'

It was simply amazing; if all the stories I had heard were true, or even the half of them, one word from Allan Kerr would ruin Sir John entirely, probably send him to penal servitude or the gallows; yet, knowing not whether that word had yet been spoken or not, he could still talk like this.

I wished him good-bye, and turned as I walked down to the doctor's to see that tall, thin figure, keen face, and white hair in his light grey homespun coat and knickerbockers, standing in the porch in the centre of the house as he had stood when I first saw him.

That had been my first step out of the ordinary commonplace routine of my life into the strange weird romance which had since spun itself round me. Now, though I knew it not at the time, I was taking another equally conclusive. Little could I guess that never again in this world should I see the figure of the old baronet which had grown so familiar to me in the last few weeks. So I walked rapidly down the avenue to the doctor's house.

CHAPTER XVI

As I came up to the gate the hired trap with the Fiscal was rapidly approaching from the shore road.

The doctor stood by the gate welcoming us both.

'Come away in, gentlemen—come away! You are in excellent time, and my patient is just grand this morning. I was afraid he would be nervous, but not a bit; he's just longing to tell his story, and it is a strange one. Well, I'll not keep you havering here; come away in!'

The doctor's nervousness was clear from his lapse into the vernacular.

We passed straight into the little bedroom behind the consulting-room where the sick man had been so carefully tended, and so scrupulously isolated. The little man was propped up in bed, looking curiously alert and active.

'Good morning, Mr. Kerr,' said the Fiscal in his somewhat dry, pompous manner. 'You have been very ill, I fear, but I trust you are now quite recovered, or, at all events, sufficiently so to give us the account of how this strange mischance has happened to you. I understand you have some other curious things to tell us, which it may be I shall have

to advise the Crown to investigate, but we must deal with one matter at a time.'

'No; I beg your pardon, sir, the two stories are really one, and, under your favour, I must just tell 'em as I can, or else you could never understand. It's just all the villainy of one man, or rather, in a way of speaking, of three men; for the father began it, and the two sons carried it on.'

'Well, Mr. Kerr, tell us in your own way; that will be best.'

'All right, sir. Well, you must understand that about forty years ago I was the junior clerk in Menzies and Chisholm, a very good old firm in these parts. You'll know them, doctor. We acted for the Camerons of Ard na Righ; they were far and away our best clients; we had done everything for them for generations, and all their papers were in the office. Old Sir John Bradley, the father of the present man, was also a client of sorts; he was a great speculator, and he used to consult Mr. Chisholm about Scotch securities and investments, and sometimes more speculative things; he dabbled in gold mines and copper mines and all sorts. I mind he used to tell us, when I first came to the office, that he was come from the Cameron family, but we never heeded him much.'

'Who was the laird of Ard na Righ then, Mr. Kerr?' said the Fiscal.

'Oh, just Duncan Cameron, the last laird but one, the father of Mr. Alastair; sair set he was on reviving the old place, and always trying to get money to restore his family. Well, one day Sir John comes

down here rather mysterious like, and he was closeted with Mr. Menzies, the senior partner for a long time all alone; but the little room where I sat was next to Mr. Menzies', and when they got excited and raised their voices, I couldn't help hearing what they were saying. And Sir John, it seems, had got some wonderful gold mine out in Africa that no one else knew anything about, and it was going to make everyone's fortune, and he'd got the concessions, and all he wanted was some solicitor to do the legal business for him. Then there was a good deal in a low voice that I couldn't catch, and then he said that our firm had treated him very well, and he wanted to put a good thing in our way, and would Mr. Menzies act for him? Of course we were always glad of new business; it was a sleepy sort of place, anyhow. Then he said he would give Mr. Menzies some shares in place of his expenses, and he would give a guarantee to redeem them at par any time Mr. Menzies pleased, but that they would be worth double that. And then he suggested that Mr. Menzies should underwrite a lot of the shares at eighty per cent. "It 'll be some hundreds in your pocket, just for nothing, you know," says he. "I would do it myself, only I'm too busy to place them. It's a dead sure thing; you've only got to put your hat on, and run round for an afternoon, and you'll have it all, and put the commission in your pocket, and a damned handsome one too."

'"Yes! I know," says Mr. Menzies; "but you know, this isn't London, nor yet Glasgow; there's few enough people about here who could buy these

shares if they wanted to." "What about Duncan Cameron?" says Sir John. "The very thing for him, poor chap!" says Mr. Menzies; "he wants some money badly enough, but he hasn't got a sixpence to buy them with." Then they spoke low for a bit, and then, "I'll lend it him," says Sir John, "on the security of his estate. I'll lend him enough to buy everything he likes to take. I shall be quite safe; the property's well worth it." "But why not hold them yourself, Sir John?" says Mr. Menzies; and it was just the question that was running through my own mind. "Well," he says, "you see, it doesn't do for one man to hold the whole blamed lot; don't look well in the City, you know; besides that, I want to do you a turn, and I want to do Cameron a turn; you know, he is a sort of cousin of mine, and I'm not sure but what I ought to be where he is. Anyhow, I'd be mighty glad to see the old place set on its legs again, and if we three are the principal holders we shall all make our pile before the outsiders get a look in." Then Mr. Menzies says, "But are you quite sure the thing's safe as you say, Sir John?" "Devil a doubt about it," says he; "my son William is out there, and here's his report about it." That is the Mr. William, sir, who lives over by Alt na Crois.'

'Stop a moment,' said the Fiscal. 'I remember at our last meeting here you suddenly asked Sir John, the present Sir John, if he had ever been in Africa, and then you asked Mr. William the same question. Now, had this anything to do with Mr. Kerr's story?'

'Not one bit,' said the doctor; 'it was wholly on another point.'

'May I know what it was? I don't want to lose sight of any clues, and the fact of Mr. William being in Africa seems an important one in various ways. I should like to have all the points about this as we go on.'

'Well, it's quite disconnected, but our friend's illness looked to me extremely like the effects of a certain African poison, and I had reason to believe that either Sir John or his brother, or both, had some ill-will against him, and it just flashed into my mind that they might have some hand in it.'

'That they had, doctor,' said the little man eagerly; 'and that was just where Mr. William learned all the African deviltry while he was looking after that precious gold mine and faking up the reports, for the whole thing was a swindle. I've got his little book of notes; it was all just nonsense to me, queer marks and scratches and Latin words, and some of it not even that; the doctor's got it now. I told him where to find it in my house; no one's ever seen it since I got it until now.'

'I have it,' said the doctor, 'and a mighty startling thing it is; but we must come to that later.'

'All right; I see,' said the Fiscal, writing busily; 'Mr. William's stay in Africa means two things—his brother's gold mine, and his own knowledge of secret poisons.'

'That's right,' said the doctor, 'and both of them infernal rascalities. Now, if you please, Fiscal, we'd best let our friend here go on with his story.'

'I didn't hear any more that time worth telling,' said the little man; 'the next thing was that I was

told to prepare a mortgage of the lands of Ard na Righ. I was only a junior clerk, you understand, and I was not very quick at deeds, and when I had done it there were some mistakes, and I had to do it over again. And altogether there was a lot of delay, and I got pretty badly sworn at. Mr. Cameron used to come into the office, saying how his chance had come at last, and he was going to have pots of money, and set up his old place again. His whole heart was in his place, and always asking about his loan ; and I kept my eyes on the price of the gold-mine shares in the paper, for I was getting interested naturally, and they went up to about a hundred per cent. premium ; and then Mr. Menzies got the tip to sell out, and he realized a heap of money ; but Mr. Cameron hadn't got his shares yet, though Sir John always said they were set aside for him, and that of course he wouldn't pay more than par value for them. And then came a day when the price began to go down, and the next day it was worse, and then some hints began to come out that the thing was a swindle, and the price rushed down to nothing, and Mr. Cameron said he would have nothing to do with them or the loan either. But one fine morning Sir John came into the office, and went straight into Mr. Menzies' room, and I heard him say the minute he got in, " Duncan has signed." " No, not really," said Mr. Menzies ; " how in all the earth did you manage it ?" " Drunk as a piper last night," says Sir John ; " hadn't a notion what he was writing. I've got two witnesses, though, to swear he was sober and knew everything about it.

Here are the papers; keep them safe; of course, you'd better continue to act as Cameron's lawyer. I shan't tell him anything about these papers at present; he'll forget so much he won't be sure whether he really did sign them or not, and won't know more than a baby what became of the money." Then they talked low, and I lost the rest.'

'Did you see those papers?' said the Fiscal.

'Not till long afterwards, but I know they were signed and witnessed all right, and the money supposed to be lent was, in fact, drawn out of Sir John's bank and handed over; but Mr. Cameron never got it.'

'Indeed! How was that?'

'Well, Mr. Cameron kept coming to the office and blaming Sir John for misleading him about the shares, and about that time Mr. William came home.'

'Ha!' said the doctor.

'Mr. Cameron was changed after that; he began to lose his memory—got dotty, in fact. Then one day he and Sir John met in Mr. Menzies' room, and I heard Sir John say, "But, man, you got the money, and it's going to be invested in shares at the right moment." "I don't want your swindling shares," said he; "I want my money, if you did really lend it me." "Why, of course I lent it you, my dear Duncan," says Sir John; "you must remember giving me a receipt for it. Oh, it's all safe, my dear boy, and you needn't buy a single share unless you like, though, mind you, you're an ass if you don't; for we have beared the stock down till you can get it for almost nothing now, and when we

have cleared out all the outsiders, you'll see how it will bound up again." He kept on just playing with Mr. Cameron, confusing him, and Mr. Cameron never saw that he was talking nonsense and contradicting himself.

'"I want my money," says he, sullen-like. "Well, you shall have it," says Sir John; "all the better for me, Duncan. I was trying to do you a turn, but I'd a lot rather have the stuff myself. I can make about £50 off every share; but just now, Duncan, I shall have to ask you for that money I lent you, or, at any rate, the last fifty thousand." "That you lent me," said Mr. Cameron, mazed-like; "you never lent it me." "Oh yes, I did," says Sir John; "your coachman was there, and saw it; don't you remember the old pocket-book you put the notes into, and you could hardly force them all in?" Then he remembered. But when he was gone I heard Sir John chuckle, and say to Mr. Menzies, "Silly ass! he got the notes all right, but he's forgotten; he gave them back to me to keep and invest for him; they're all under the stair in the old castle. Oh, what a game! I shall just go and get them back when all's done." This was the last I knew about it, gentlemen. Our firm acted for Mr. Cameron when Sir John brought his action of Declarator of "Expiry of the Legal" to get possession of the estates, and it was simply given away; we made no defence. Mr. Cameron was quite incapable of instructing us; he was asleep half his days, and quite dotty, and soon after he just fell into a sort of trance, and died. I mind our Counsel raised some question

about Mr. Cameron's not having got the money, but Mr. Menzies told him not to press that, and it was dropped.'

'Give me some dates,' said the Fiscal.

'Well, sir, it was about forty years ago that old Sir John first came about the office; I should say it was about thirty-three or thirty-five years ago that Mr. Duncan Cameron died and Mr. Alastair succeeded. The action killed Mr. Duncan; he just knew he'd been swindled out of his old family property, and he never could tell how.'

The Fiscal wrote rapidly for some minutes; then he said:

'What became of the Cameron family?'

'Mr. Alastair succeeded; he was a minor at the time, and his mother was a guardian; they lived on at the old Dower House. I don't think there was much change; you see, the estates had long been in the hands of trustees; then, after he came of age, his mother died, and he married, and Miss Morag and her sisters were born at the Dower House.'

'Of course,' said the doctor; 'I remember them well. It must have been ten years ago that I used to see Morag swimming with her father—a dainty little slip of a girl she was. Well, sir, you must know that all this time Sir John's action was being carried on by his son, the present Sir John; and Mr. Alastair, he came to look into it, and he came to me for information, and I gave him a good deal—not all I knew, though; and I promised to look out the papers for him, for I had carried them all away from the office, after Mr. Menzies shot himself; but poor Mr. Alas-

tair got no chance to make use of them, for he just fell into a kind of trance, and died in two days, and the widow never had any heart to carry on the litigation. She had a small income of her own, I believe, and she just went away with her three daughters, and lived quiet somewhere, I never heard where.'

'Ah, yes, I know,' said the doctor; 'that was when I saw Morag last; terribly delicate she was then; I wonder if she got over it.'

'Well,' said the Fiscal, 'now I want to know about the Bradleys.'

'The old Sir John died, sir, soon after the action was started, and his son, the present Sir John, carried it on, as I said; it was a long business, so much proof wanted to identify all the lands; and the present Sir John, he always knew that his father had not really parted with the money he professed to lend Duncan Cameron, but where it was he never could tell. I think that the old man had been afraid to tell anyone or to put it on paper, and he died quite sudden-like, and the present Sir John's been searching and searching for years and years, and at last he came to me, and I told him I knew that it had never been paid over, and he bothered me to tell him how I knew, and I wouldn't; but at last I told him what I overheard.'

'You pretty well signed your death-warrant when you did that, my friend!' said the doctor.

'So I know now, sir!' replied the little man. 'But, after all, I knew that it was hidden in the old castle.'

'You knew it was hidden, and that was enough.'

The Fiscal now turned to me.

'What do you make of it, Mr. Kingsburgh?' he said.

'It's very simple,' was my answer. 'The elder Sir John persuades Mr. Cameron, father of the last laird, to borrow large sums on the security of his property in order to buy some worthless shares. He gets a receipt from him when he is drunk, but no one can prove this; he doesn't hand over the money or the shares, and the documents are all in good order, and he forecloses the mortgage, as we should say in England.'

'You notice how much of the story is likely to be capable of proof in court?'

'I do.'

'Do you think, so far, there is anything whatsoever to charge against the present Sir John, even admitting that the whole story is true, as I have no doubt it is.'

'There is nothing whatever so far as we have gone, but here I think I can supply some evidence myself that unquestionably connects the present Sir John with his father's rascalities.'

'Indeed! Well, I must take your evidence later; I want to finish with Mr. Kerr now. We must go on to the present time. Mr. Kerr, if you please, I want to know how you came to be found, as you were, in the old castle and almost dead. There is a crime there which I shall have to advise the Crown about.'

'It's all part of the same story,' said the little

man eagerly. 'I told you how Mr. Cameron died.'

'I've got a word or two to say about that,' said the doctor. 'You said, I think, that it was after Mr. William came home. I was away on holiday myself, but my locum left a fairly full account of the case; he called in a consultant, but they could make nothing of it.'

'That's quite true, sir. Well, there were about half a dozen who knew something more or less of the story; there was Jessie Maclean, the housemaid at the old Dower House; and Rory Stewart, who had been Mr. Cameron's coachman, and saw him get the notes; and two or three more. Well, the same sort of thing happened to them all; they got mixed up in a friendly sort of way with the gipsies at the glen, and then they used to fall into curious sort of trances, and lose their memory, and at last they died. You'll know those cases, doctor.'

'I remember well,' said the doctor; 'now listen to this.' He produced a little book black with age and constant use. 'This is the book that our friend here says he took from Mr. William; here is the translation of some of the cryptic ciphers, which are just medical symbols for the most part:

'"When the *Glossina* bites a patient with sleeping sickness, a parasite enters the blood of the fly, and a virus is formed whereby the sleeping sickness is communicated to the next person bitten by that fly. The tribe of M'Bula Wamba have a method of extracting this virus and making a cultivation." Oh, well! never mind that; it is all technical.

"This cultivation, if entirely excluded from the air, and kept at the temperature of the human body, will retain its efficacy for many weeks; the natives enclose it in a bladder, and keep it under the armpit of the medicine-man. This being injected by means of a certain thorn will communicate a variety of the sleeping sickness which is usually fatal in a very short time." '

The doctor turned over several pages.

'Now,' he said, 'this is interesting: "*Symptoms.* —It differs somewhat from sleeping sickness; the period of incubation of the virus is much shorter; unless very small doses are given, sometimes it takes effect almost at once, suddenly, and in full strength. Occasionally the patient is paralysed, unable to move a muscle, yet fully conscious. This simulates some forms of catalepsy." There are a lot more technical details which I needn't trouble you with, but, referring to my case-book, I find the course of this induced disease exactly agrees with the symptoms of those mysterious cases that puzzled us so much.'

'And this little book, you say,' said the Fiscal, 'was found by you, doctor, in Mr. Kerr's house?'

'Yes; by his direction, I went and found a loose stone in the wall, behind which this book and one or two other papers were hidden.'

'I see; and now, Mr. Kerr, please tell me how it came into your possession?'

'This way, sir: I had done a good turn to old Blythe Simpson—he was the father of Faa Simpson, who calls himself the King of the Gipsies—and one

day he comes to me. "Look here, Allan," says he, "some day you will be in great danger—you know too much for Mr. William; just you keep this little book; he dropped it in my tent; it will be very useful to you in case of trouble." And I've kept it ever since.'

'H'm!' said the Fiscal. 'Well, go on, Mr. Kerr; tell me about your illness.'

'Well, sir, I never felt anything at all till Faa Simpson came up to be gamekeeper to Mr. William; soon after that I began to feel my strength failing. I thought I was growing old or something, but I lost heart over everything, and used to fall asleep in the middle of the day, or at my work, or all sorts sorts of times.'

The doctor interrupted.

'Tell me, were you stung by a fly of any sort, that you can remember?'

'Yes, twice; I remember I was bitten by a midge in the back of my neck; it made a painful sore.'

'Was Faa Simpson there?'

'Yes, it was in his house.'

'Well, go on.'

'One day I was talking to some of the gipsies just by the bridge, and I just tumbled over in a faint; the next thing I remember I was up in their encampment—dear knows how I got there. I could see and hear everything, but as for moving, not an eyelid could I stir. I just lay like a dead man, and a lot of them were round, and they'd got some sort of a hand-barrow, and they lifted me on to it. I made sure they thought I was dead, and that they were

going to bury me alive, but for all that not a finger could I stir; I was properly scared, as you may guess.'

'Stop a moment, Mr. Kerr,' said the doctor; 'can you tell us how long ago that was?'

'I haven't a notion,' said the little man; I've lost all count of time, but I can tell you it was the day that Mr. Kingsburgh was expected to come to the big house, for I heard the servants speaking of it. Well, sir, I just lay like a log on that hand-barrow; sometimes I seemed to lose consciousness; then I would come to myself again for a bit, and it got quite dark; then I heard the stable clock strike twelve, and I knew I was being carried somewhere. How I got out of the glen I don't know; they were carrying me away to bury me, I felt convinced, and I tried hard to call out or to move, or to let them know anyhow that I was alive; but it wouldn't do, and they carried me past the back of the big house. There's a wee bit court there; I've helped the gardener to store his tools and things there sometimes. Well, there's a window blocked up and nailed up, I think, on the house side, but when they carried me past the frame and all was away, and there was a bright light in a room there, and I saw Sir John looking out. "Take him to the old place," says he, soft-like, and they carried me somehow into the old castle.'

Here, then, was the explanation of the shadow pantomime I had seen on the night of my first arrival at Ard na Righ.

'Faa Simpson seemed to be watching over me as far as I could make out, but I lost consciousness.

I can only just remember waking up and crying out, "For God's sake, let me go!" Then I fainted again, and I remember nothing more till I woke up here.'

The Fiscal had been scribbling rapidly as the little man was talking; now he read rapidly through his notes, and turned to the doctor.

'Is there anything to connect that book with Mr. William Bradley?' he said.

'Nothing whatsoever in the book itself,' he replied; 'it isn't in his handwriting. I don't know the writing; there's only the way it was found.'

'And that,' said the Fiscal, 'depends on Mr. Kerr's remembrance of what Blythe Simpson, who is dead, told him. Now, tell me, Mr. Kingsburgh, in your opinion as a lawyer, is there anything, so far as we have got, to connect Mr. William Bradley with this business?'

'Nothing whatever that would hold in court for a moment,' I said; 'but I think I can supply the missing links; I shall want my papers, however.'

'Ah, well, time goes on. I think we must take your evidence after we have had some lunch.'

I interposed here.

'Tell me, Mr. Kerr,' I said; 'this is a thing that bothers me. I have heard—you will remember, Fiscal, you noticed it yourself—that in all the cases of these strange deaths there has been some mention of what they speak of as Morag the Seal. The doctor says that Mr. Kerr has had some experience of this Morag the Seal; indeed, it is rumoured that this was partly the cause of Sir John's enmity against him. Also, Mr. Kerr has spoken of Miss Morag Cameron;

I should like to know if he connects the two together in any way.'

'I am glad you asked that, Mr. Kingsburgh,' said the Fiscal; it was in my mind, and I stupidly forgot it. What do you say, Mr. Kerr ?'

'The two are one and the same, sir—at least, that's my belief. It was five or six years ago, so far as I remember, that I last saw Miss Morag here; she was always wonderfully good to me, and I was wondering how I'd get on without her, for she had to go, and she just said: "Allan, I shall always dream of you and of the old home, and I believe I shall come to you all in my dreams, and help you perhaps more than I can do now." And that's just what I hold she did, sir, for I and many another of those she used to be kind to and to help have thought we saw her about in the woods or on the shore just where she used to walk, bless her bonny face ! and she just told us what we were to do. But Sir John and Mr. William got to hearing of folk seeing Miss Morag, and it suited their purpose, and when there came any sudden death that wasn't just convenient for the Bradleys to talk about, some one says, "Oh, it's Morag the Seal !" and some of the silly, superstitious folk about got to saying that they would bury Morag. That's a very old story over a hundred years ago, when another Morag Cameron that was a witch died, and the minister said that she could only be kept down if she was buried in the old ruined kirk, with certain ceremonies. But our lads don't forget, sir, and they talk of burying Morag to this day.'

'Well, well,' said the Fiscal, 'there seems no doubt that grave crimes have been committed by some one, and circumstances point strongly to the Bradleys having something to do with them; but, so far as I can see, we can only definitely say that old Sir John Bradley, who is dead, and some gipsies, who are not here, and who may have bolted, are the only persons we have a definite case against. It depends entirely on your story, Mr. Kingsburgh, what advice I am to give to the Crown. I cannot suggest any action whatever against either of the Bradleys on the story that we have heard this morning.'

The doctor looked seriously concerned. I could see in his face how troubled this opinion left him; personally he would have rejoiced had his old friend been found absolutely innocent, while his duty urged him to bring a cruel and heartless criminal to justice. The Fiscal's point of view, however, left the whole matter in a fog, with but little chance of clearing it.

'I would ask you to lunch with me, Mr. Kingsburgh, but it will be far better if you go back to Airton House. Lunch with Sir John; tell him that our friend here has recovered enough to speak, and has told us the whole story of his illness; see how he takes it. I needn't tell an old cross-examiner like you how to deal with him; his manner will show his guilt or innocence better than anything. Don't you think so, Fiscal?'

'You ought to have been a lawyer, doctor,' said the Fiscal, with admiration.

So we parted, and I set out to return to Airton House, feeling very tired and worn out, and not in

the least fit for telling the story of my own discoveries, which seemed nothing in themselves, but which fitted with curious accuracy into what we had heard that morning, and would make a connected account and a convincing case against both of the Bradley brothers. Walking along, I felt the heat of the sun terribly, and once or twice felt myself growing faint and giddy; but I braced my energies, shook off the feeling, and went on again. Beside the Gipsy Glen the feeling of faintness was so marked that I looked around for a gipsy who would lend me a friendly arm to the house, but none were in sight. Then I bethought me of Faa Simpson's pigeon-call, and I took it out and blew it, sitting down on a big boulder to recover my strength.

In a minute or two the Gipsy King stood before me.

'Mr. Simpson,' I said, 'the heat has been too much for me; would you have the kindness to lend me your arm as far as the house? I am feeling a bit faint; it is most unusual with me.'

He looked at me keenly and critically.

'I was looking for you, sir,' he said, 'but somehow I missed you until you called. You have eaten the gipsy's bread and salt, and you are sacred, though I am putting my head in peril to save you. You are in urgent danger, and not on any condition must you go to the house now. Sir John knows what was said at the doctor's house this morning, and if you go back to Airton House you'll never leave it.'

'How can he possibly know?' I asked in wonderment.

'One of my own people, I'm grieved to say,' said the gipsy, 'though why I should be grieved I don't know; I've played the same game myself often enough; but I've got to save you, and it's put me in a tight place. A gipsy-lad was listening under the window all the time that the wee loonie was telling his story, and he bolted to Sir John with it before you left.'

'But you know, Mr. Simpson, I must be back at the doctor's this afternoon.'

'I know, sir, and so you shall be, if you are strong enough; you don't look much like it now. Meantime, you must come into the glen; you'll be safe there. Sir John and all his rascals can't get in when the gipsies' front door is bolted.'

I knew enough of gipsy character and gipsy honour to trust him absolutely now, though I knew him for a scoundrel of the deepest dye otherwise—thief, murderer, in all probability. I had eaten his bread and salt, and he would hang sooner than he would betray me.

Leaning on his arm, I went up the glen, and through the tunnel behind the fall into the gipsy camp.

Here that strange faintness came over me again. I tried to sit down on a boulder before the Simpsons' tent, but missed my footing, and opened my eyes to find myself lying on the sward.

Faa Simpson raised me up.

'You are very ill, I fear, sir,' he said. 'It was I

that poisoned you—you know that, I dare say, now; you were not a friend then; I'll do my utmost for you now.'

A dimness swam before my eyes; then for a moment it was dark. When I opened them again Esther was bending over me.

'It's all right, Mr. Kingsburgh,' she said; 'I shall nurse you for the sake of Morag the Seal, and my brother will be as true as steel now, but you mustn't move for two or three days.'

I tried to turn to thank her, but every limb was rigid; even my eyes were fixed, yet my brain was abnormally active. I recalled the position. The Fiscal was waiting for my story, for the missing links which I alone could give, to enable him to make a case against anyone. Sir John Bradley had the start; he knew everything that had been said in that little consulting-room; he had all his wealth, his diabolical knowledge of secret poisons, and, maybe, many other uncanny secrets; and here was I, who alone, perhaps, could baffle his dark designs, helplessly caught in a living death, and, what was worse than all, my beloved Morag was left a helpless prey to this scoundrel, and I, who had sworn to defend and protect her, unable to stir a finger or utter a word.

Then the dimness came again, and it grew dark, and consciousness vanished.

CHAPTER XVII

It is a painful, indeed, a terrible, experience, and one which I suppose has come to the lot of very few, to wake into perfect consciousness without the power of giving the faintest sign, hearing and seeing everything that passes around, yet unable to indicate in the remotest degree that one does so, and to be to all intents and purposes a dead body containing a very much alive and conscious soul.

In this way I regained my consciousness in the Gipsy Glen. Fortunately, Faa Simpson seemed quite to realize the position; he stood beside and spoke to me, though I could give no indication of hearing him.

'Sir John has been hunting everywhere for you,' he said. 'It would have been an asphyxiating chamber if you were not sufficiently helpless; a fallen beam in the old castle pitched over your body; if you were found, it would be, of course, an accident; you had been warned not to climb there; no blame to anyone but yourself. Several others will be cleared off for this morning's work; the wee loonie's recovery has upset his plans, but he thinks he's quite able to deal with the position. We'll

foil him, though, this time. As soon as the coast is clear, I am going to have you taken to the doctor's; he will be able to put you all right again. I'm not going to apologize for poisoning you; you were nothing to me then, though, indeed, I wish now it had been any other man. But when the Bradleys ordered me to kill a man who had eaten my bread and salt, they didn't know the gipsies. I've done with them for good now, and I'll pull you through I know enough to hang that pair several times over. I know what no one else does, and what the Fiscal could never find out—how they got that African poison. Listen now, sir: you may have to prove this if anything happens to me. It was through that African missionary who is in Glasgow now, the Rev. Peter Macdougal; he's half a nigger and a Voodooist, and a blackguard generally. Scare him with a threat of exposure, and he'll tell you everything. He's mortally afraid of losing his berth.'

Here a man came up hurriedly, and spoke a few words to him in Romany.

'I must go,' he said—'an urgent message. Esther, watch him till I come back. I know you have a message he will be glad to have; as soon as I'm back, I'll see about taking him to the doctor's. You are safe with my sister and me, sir, but I'm not sure even that all our people can be trusted. I have just heard that the Fiscal has half a dozen policemen waiting out of sight in case of accidents, and Sir John's on his guard too now, and you may be sure his blackguard brother is up to every move. So things will move pretty fast.'

He walked rapidly away, and Esther came out of the tent, and stood just where my eyes could fall on her without moving, which was impossible for me. She was really a very pretty girl, and there was now an expression of Divine pity about her that made her look actually lovely.

'Give yourself no concern, Mr. Kingsburgh,' she said. 'I understand perfectly; I know that you hear and see and understand, though you can't move or give any sign; so I shall just talk to you, and know that you hear and follow me. I have seen the same thing before; we have had several with the same kind of sickness here; the last was the wee loonie. They are mostly paralysed just as you are for a time; then there comes a time when they can move and speak again for a bit, especially if they are frightened or angry or anything moves them much; but the attack comes on again, and they are just as rigid as before. If nothing's done, they die usually, though two recovered; they had had only small doses of the poison, and my brother cured two more with an antidote he has. I hear the doctor can cure them all now; I hope so. I have nursed many, but I think it's terrible, though our people don't think much of life, and are always ready enough to kill. Still, a thrust of a knife in a passion is one thing, and a secret poison is another; it is treacherous and dishonourable, I think. Now, I know you will be wanting to hear the message my brother spoke of. I have had a long letter from my dear Miss Morag—Morag the Seal, God bless her!—and I wouldn't wonder if you should see her

much sooner than you should think. She writes from Oban, and they were coming on to the county town; that's just over the hill, you know, where Menzies and Chisholm's office was. I think they should be there now; it was yesterday they were to come on.'

Esther drew the letter from her pocket, and held it up for me to see; it was written in a rather painfully careful hand, as if slowly and with difficulty, not in the least like the big scrawly hand I had noticed in the letter to Mrs. MacCulloch. Esther then read it out to me.

'"DEAREST ESTHER, SWEETEST LITTLE SISTER,

'"Just fancy how clever people are now! Do you know, I have actually been taught to write with my own hand. Six months I have been practising, and now my first real letter is to you. I am so glad, for now I can write freely to you, which I haven't been able to do for five years. Of course, I don't count the little notes my sister has written for me. I could never speak freely heart to heart that way, and, you know, my last real letter to you in my own hand was five years ago, when I told you how troublesome my eyes were, and they grew worse, till I got quite blind, as you know. You will wonder at this address. It is an inspiration of mine. I had a dream or a vision, or something, and I seemed to be so clearly told that I was to come back to the old country, that I was wanted for something very important, that I simply insisted, and you know my mother and sisters do everything I ask. I'm

afraid they spoil me horribly, and so here we are, and to-morrow we go on, and are to stay at the Cameron Arms; you know the place. Do you remember the surreptitious lunch you and I had there ages ago—I fear to think how long. Well, dear, what do you think the post has brought me some three or four days ago? Nothing less than a proposal of marriage in solemn form from Sir John Bradley. Just imagine the insolence of the old ruffian! Oh, I was angry. I thought how I could answer him best; then I thought of the trick you taught me of dreaming true, as you call it; never did I put so much energy into that bit of Romany sorcery as I did that time. I just concentrated all my feelings about the Bradleys—and you know they are pretty vicious—into one ball like a dynamite cartridge, and I *willed* that I would go and talk to him; and, oh, my dear, what a dream I had! Talk about Mrs. Siddons! The way that in my dream I stood over that old rascal and let him have it was a joy, and it seemed that he just cowered down before me, like the hound that he is (I beg the pardon of all canine hounds for the libel), and I didn't spare the lash either. I had had some little experiences of the kind before when I had tried to go in dream and scare him up a bit. I wish I could know what he felt like at the time; you used to tell me that the person one dreamed of in this way would know all about it, just as if you were there—that is, if they were sensitive enough."

'Of course they do,' said Esther, by way of parenthesis. 'I have often seen my darling

Morag in that way when she was dreaming of me.'

'"But," the letter went on, "I wonder what you would make of this. I dreamed quite suddenly of a man I never saw in the flesh, and whom I don't suppose I ever shall see, if, indeed, he exists at all outside of my own imagination. Oh, my dear, such a perfect Prince Charming of a man, just the type of man we have talked of so often together in the old days. I suppose really I remembered all our girlish fancies, and my mind put them together and spun a romance about it and about the old home. Oh, Esther darling, I was so lonely, and life seemed to have all gone grey and sad. Can you wonder that I encouraged that dream, and lived in my little imaginary romance, and there was no need to be shy when he kissed me in my dream, or to think of propriety when we swam together out to the Seal's Rock? I could just enjoy it all frankly, for it was just a dream, and no need to pretend anything for convention's sake."

'Was it?' commented Esther. 'I am not quite so sure.'

'"Guess, dear,"' she read on, '"if you can, how delicious my dreams grew to me. You can't, though, not unless you had to drag out day after day on the sofa, and in the dark—alone, too, mostly; for my mother and my sisters have to work hard you know, to keep things going, and though they spoil me in every way they can't often find time to read to me or to talk to me. I have learned to read the books for the blind, but, oh dear, they are all goody books,

missionary things, almost more boring than lying still with nothing to do. So thank you, thank you a thousand times, dear little sister, for this bit of sorcery. I call it sorcery just to tease you, for you know I don't think that; and if it is, it's the very whitest magic that anyone ever practised. It has given me my little dream-romance that has been the joy of my life. Some day I'll tell you all about it; it would make a splendid novel; and if I meet my Prince Charming in solid and material existence, you shall know him too. And now, I don't know; my warning dream that brought us here seemed to have something to do with him, as though he was to do us some great benefit, and perhaps bring us back to our own. But also he was in very great danger, and I had to help him—save his life, so I think; so it's reciprocal, you see, and I didn't dream this as part of my romance, but it came as a definite warning, like the sight, or the voices that I hear sometimes.

' " What a long letter I have written! but the fact is that I have promised my tutor to practise for two hours every day my writing, and I have just about been that time now in writing to you. He won't see it, but he must put up with that for once, seeing that it's my first letter for five years. Adieu, little sister. May all the saints and angels watch over you! In a day or two we shall be together." '

Wonderful was this letter to me, every word of it tallying exactly with my own experiences. A month or two ago I should have laughed to scorn

the idea that such things could be—as, indeed, I had said that 'Peter Ibbetson' and kindred works were too far-fetched to be even funny. Yet here was I actually experiencing the very same thing in my own proper person, and involuntarily many stories the doctor had told me recurred to my mind. His Indian doctor, who apparently came and prescribed for him when he was hundreds of miles away, simply by dint of an earnest wish to do so; the doctor's own prescribing of dandelion tea for the old woman, who was so confident she saw and heard him, and many minor instances. I recalled also how the doctor had told me that it was a faculty which every one had in some degree, however slightly—when, for instance, one thought suddenly or dreamed of a person, and the same day got a letter or a message from the person dreamed of; or when two persons thought of the same thing simultaneously; or when one was conscious in absolute darkness that another person was in the room. All these, the doctor had told me, were manifestations of the same faculty, only very faint and elementary; and all or most of these were within my own personal experience.

I had read in popular books on theosophy and occult science generally of the power of projecting one's double, so that it appears as a ghost, or even as a material form at a given place, and, of course, one is familiar with similar powers in Oriental stories. I had once asked the doctor if these were true, but to this he would give no definite answer; only he said that this was quite different. There was no

projection of a ghost or double, nothing spiritual or supernatural, but just two brains were accurately tuned together ; and, as in the Marconi instruments, when an idea—that is, in fact, a set of vibrations—was strongly developed in the one, it was repeated in the other. Moreover, the very presence of a strongly developed set of vibrations in one brain tended to induce a negative or dreaming condition in the other, and thus, in point of fact, Morag's sorcery, as interpreted by the doctor's science, simply came to this : that the gipsy's instructions had taught her how to concentrate her will and imagination on going to sleep, and so to develop powerful currents of vibration in her own brain, which then affected any brain, even at a considerable distance, in tune with her own. I remembered now also that the doctor had said that this power was much more possessed by the blind than by those who had sight, and thus it was really only a mutual dream, artificially rendered extremely vivid ; but as it was the thought of one person communicated thus to another, it was quite appropriately called by the gipsy-girl 'dreaming true.'

So ran my thoughts while I lay there helpless. Esther watched me, now and then saying a few gentle words ; by some rare intuition, she seemed to know without fail what to say and when to say it, so as to help and soothe and never to irritate, and the hours of the afternoon slipped by. The shades of evening were closing, and already it was dark in the glen, and lights began to gleam in many of the huts and tents ; still Faa Simpson had not returned.

Suddenly round the corner came four men, who spoke to Esther a few words in Romany. She turned to me, saying :

'Here are the men my brother has sent for you. Good-bye, dear friend. I shall see you again, I hope, with my darling Morag.'

The men had hastily covered a rude kind of litter with some rugs and cloths, and, placing me upon it with a certain rough courtesy, such as gipsies always seem to show, they lifted it up and carried me down the glen towards the waterfall ; here the gipsies' front door was unlocked, and we passed through the tunnel and out into the lower glen, the usual bird-calls being given and answered to indicate that all was safe. So up on to the bridge, but here, to my surprise and dismay, they turned not to the left, as I had expected, towards the doctor's, but to the right towards Airton House. What on earth could be the meaning of this change in their policy ? Were they going, after all, to betray me ? Was Faa Simpson a traitor ? I could not think it ; yet up through the lodge gates they carried me, unable to move, or speak, or question, or remonstrate—a helpless yet keenly conscious log—round to the back of the house, and into the little court that lay under the window of my room—mine no longer now, nor to be mine any more. As it chanced, underneath my window, the boarded-up window I had noticed before, was now wide open, and I clearly saw what the wee loonie had told us of in the morning —the whole crazy structure, frame and all, opened as one piece, and within was strongly girded with

what looked like steel rods. A light was burning there, but the room was empty. I caught, however, a momentary glimpse of a chemical furnace, some retorts, and other apparatus. The right-hand leader of my bearers turned to his fellow, and said :

'That's what he calls the lethal chamber. I expect more than one honest chap has met his end there.'

'Come on,' said the other ; 'we ain't paid to talk about these things. I'm paid to act, and know nothing.'

The grated door at the end of the court was open, and into it I was carried, and through a door of whose existence I had been ignorant till that moment, and we were in the old castle. Up some stairs, and over a stone passage, and then into a little stone vaulted room, where they set their burden down.

'Poor chap !' said one of them, 'I wonder if he knows anything of what we have been doing or where he is ; anyhow, the sooner he kicks the blooming bucket, the better for him.'

'Wonder where Sir John was,' said another ; 'he ought to have been looking out of his chamber.'

'Never you mind,' retorted the one who had enjoined silence before. 'You'll get your money all the sooner and better for you if you keep your blessed mouth shut.'

So they filed out, pulling to the door, and leaving me a prey to the most acute apprehension. Why had I been brought here ? Was Faa Simpson privy

to this? Was I indeed in the power of the cruel and remorseless Sir John Bradley?

In the midst of these questionings came the dimness, and then unconsciousness.

When I came to myself again the moonlight was streaming full through the window, and sitting on the floor watching me was Faa Simpson the gipsy. By some strange intuition, or by some sign too minute to be noticed, he became aware that my consciousness had returned.

'Can you hear me, sir?' he said.

I could give no sign; he seemed satisfied, however.

'The scoundrels got the better of me for once,' he said. 'That was a bogus message that was sent me, just to get me out of the way, and the men who came for you were men I trusted implicitly. But Sir John's gold was too much for them; they had the password, and so they deceived my sister; but I found out as soon as I got back, and it's the last game that old villain will play unless he can get the better of the devil to whom he's going to-night. A fly bit him twice in the neck when I saw him, and with a double dose, extra strong too.'

He spoke with intense suppressed passion, and to my mind recurred the words of Morag when I saw her stand over his cowering, cringing form: 'The heather on Ben na Chat is budding now; before it blooms you will die as my dear father died by your hand.'

'Never mind, sir; they have scored this trick; the next is mine. To-night I shall take you out of here; only Sir John and I know where you are, for

he paid the journey-money of the men who brought you here, and they are already on their way to Liverpool and the United States. Sir John dies to-night; not all the doctors in the kingdom could save him after the dose he's got. To-night I take you out and convey you to the doctor's; you will soon be well again with a little of the antidote and care, so keep your heart up.'

He opened the window, swung himself out, closing it behind him, and was gone.

Immediately I saw a flash of a lantern from outside. A voice said, 'There he is! Look out!' a scuffle, a few stifled oaths, then:

'Faa Simpson, I arrest you in the name of the King.'

A quick tramp of feet, a sound as of a brief struggle, a click that intuition more than anything else told me was the click of handcuffs, a sound of feet marching away—and silence. In a flash I realized my position, shut up here in the old mouldering castle, helpless and paralysed, and likely to remain so till death. Of the only two men who knew of my whereabouts one was a prisoner, taken away I knew not where, and whose story would certainly be disbelieved; the other was my implacable enemy, and, moreover, doomed to die that night.

CHAPTER XVIII

I had lost all sense of time. It seemed to me that hours went by. Sometimes I was unconscious, sometimes conscious in that ghastly paralysed body, and the states seemed to flow into and out of each other as I lay there helpless and hopeless. All I can now recall with any clearness is that I heard voices under the window of the room that was my dungeon ; for some time I could not recognize a word. The first thing I became really aware of was the smooth, gentle voice of William Bradley, and the other I recognized as that of Sir John's head stalker.

'Look here,' said William, 'I must get into that castle somehow ; can't you suggest any way ?'

'No, indeed I can't, Mr. William,' said the man. 'There's a door up there on the top of that ivied wall, but it's locked, I know, for I tried once myself to get in there after a hoody crow's nest, or it might have been an owl. I know the gipsy boys climb in and out through one of the windows up aloft there, hanging on by the ivy, but neither you nor me, asking your pardon, Mr. William, is fit to do that.'

'But, confound it all, man! I must get in. Here's Jack dying, I honestly believe, and there are things hidden there that it's most important I should get before lawyers and people begin making their inventories and things, blast them all! Jack would never forgive me, nor you either, if we didn't get in.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. William, but did you say my master was dying?'

'Aye, did I, man! Dying as sure as ever I saw any man dying; he's caught that infernal disease, whatever it is, that so many have died of hereabouts.'

'Well, sir, I can only tell you that Sir John, he always kept the keys of the castle, and he kept them mighty close too. Several times he has had the locks changed lest some one should have got false keys. I've heard him say there was money or something hidden there, and he wouldn't have people going about hunting for it; or, indeed, it may only have been that folk thought there was money there. I never got the story quite right myself.'

'Well, look here: to-morrow morning you must meet me here with a blacksmith, and we'll force the door; I must get in. And, mind, now, not a word to a soul of what I said just now about Sir John; he may recover, perhaps. You know, people lie in these sort of trances for days and weeks sometimes before they die, and I won't have any announcement made of his death till the doctor has certified it, and I shan't call the doctor in till I'm sure that he needs it. I must examine the castle, and get the things I want out. Oh, it's not money; don't you run away with any ridiculous ideas about that.

It's only some family papers and things not the least value to anyone but us. Oh, Lord! I wish they hadn't arrested poor Simpson; he'd have scrambled in somehow and got them for me.'

'They've taken him away, so I hear, sir.'

'Aye, so they have; took him off by the night train to Glasgow on a charge of knifing another gipsy, I believe. A trumped-up story, I'm sure, but it will be a long time before he can get out again, and meantime Jack will die.'

'Let's hope not, sir.'

The speakers here seemed to pass round the corner of the castle, and I heard no more, but I had heard enough to realize that Faa Simpson's words to me had been true. He had actually contrived to inject the diabolical virus into Sir John, whose days, or even hours, were numbered; and his brother William was well aware of the money hidden by his father in the old castle, and was determined to possess himself of it before any of the formalities consequent on Sir John's death should have any chance of betraying the secret to others. And this money was really Morag's, the very sums for which her grandfather had given his receipt to the elder Sir John, and which the latter had feloniously abstracted and hidden in the old castle, in that nook under the stair of which I knew the secret, thanks to Morag's dream of her childish games in the old mouldering ruins.

Oh! for the power of motion and of action, though it were but for one half-hour, that I might rescue those records and the stolen money, that meant so

much to Morag—to do her this little service, though my own life and career should close in the doing of it. In vain! rigidly was every limb locked; not an eyelid would move; even my breath, which I suppose must have gone on automatically, was imperceptible to me. Then darkness and unconsciousness.

I revived to a sensation of deadly, and, as it seemed, causeless, fear. Something was in the room. There was a cold glimmer of light in the early dawning; the midsummer day in the West Highlands comes very early, but in the room seemed a gentle tiny patter. For half a moment I thought of the hosts of the fairies of Highland folklore, sometimes said to presage death. Yet these, as I heard always, were gracious and kindly, and, moreover, they were impalpable things of light and air, creatures of dream. This terror, whatever it was, was physical. It was an actual patter of feet in my ears, something moving that I saw, a small dark body moving furtively, then another, with a quick, scurrying movement. There were many of them, but what I could not at the moment discern. Pin points of light gleamed in the dark moving mass like eyes.

A shrill tiny squeak—then another.

Nearer moved *something*, and the feeling of fear grew and intensified. It was physical, material, yet a ghastly danger. Suddenly I knew. Rats!

Scenting a human body, they had come, hungry, savage; and I lay helpless, dead, so far as they were

concerned. Only I must needs look and watch and wait for an end more horrible than anything I had anticipated in my worst dreams. I had read of men being killed by rats in the Bush, and terrible were those stories, but they at least died fighting. If that horrid pack came nearer and attacked me, as infallibly they would do and meant to do, I was helpless; not even an arm could I raise to scare them off.

Emboldened by my stony stillness, they came nearer and nearer. I could almost fancy I could feel their soft clammy feet on my hands; clearly they could not decide if I were dead or only shamming, and were afraid to begin their horrible repast. Moments seemed ages.

At last one, bolder than the rest, actually ran over my face. It was the climax of a horror that had been growing by gradual accumulations since the first knowledge of a presence of something in the room.

My brain seemed to snap, and a strangled cry broke from my lips; the rats fled scurrying back to the sides of the room into their holes in terror of the human voice. Then I realized that the spell was broken. I pulled my arm up; it was a mighty effort, and left me bathed in perspiration, but I did it. Then I struck out with that arm; it hurt like violent cramp, but I heeded not in the joy of being at length freed from that rigid death in life that had locked every muscle and every nerve. I could move my legs too. Esther's account of the sickness had come true in my case. 'After a time,' she had

said, 'they can move or speak a bit, especially if they are frightened.' The bad scare of the rats had done for me what I was utterly unable to do for myself—had broken the spell of the deadly drug, and given me back my power of motion and action.

It was an effort, and a painful one, but I heeded not that; I was able to stand up and to walk. The rats had fled back to their dark recesses. I could now carry out my intention, and save my darling Morag's inheritance for her, come of it what might. This part of the castle was strange to me. I knew not to what room they had conveyed me, though I had been over so many rooms with Sir John; but I had matches in my pocket, and, leaving the room where the men had left me, I made my way along a stone passage, and found a winding stair, which I had little difficulty in recognizing as that behind which Morag had showed me the records. This was the hiding-place, and here, I made no doubt, the elder Sir John had deposited the money which he stole from the unfortunate Duncan Cameron, dying, after all, with the secret of the hiding-place unrevealed, and vainly sought for for so many years by his son.

Up the winding stair to the landing, here was the very place that I had stood with Morag when she bade me take careful note of every clue, that I might be able to find it for myself. There was the stone between the bottom step and the wall of the turret. Now was the critical moment; had the whole experience of my visit here with Morag been a dream, or had I in some way that I knew not

really come to know things that I had never seen with bodily eyes ?

I trod on the stone ; it would not move. I examined it closely ; the dust of ages had accumulated round its edges ; scrapings of vermin were thick on the surface ; to all appearance, it had not been disturbed for all the forty years that had elapsed since they were deposited, if, indeed, they ever were. My heart sank ; certainly Morag and I had never opened this hiding-hole, neither could I open it now ; the whole thing must have been a delusion, and my strange recovery of power useless and meaningless. I took my knife and scraped round the edges ; the dust was readily dislodged. This stone was not embedded in mortar ; working rapidly and feverishly, I cleaned it out, and again trod on the edge ; this time it canted and showed the iron spike. I pulled it upwards, as Morag had done ; the stone turned, and disclosed the hiding-hole. I took out the very same documents I had seen before, the missing records which proved the Camerons' true descent, and exposed the fabrication whereby Sir John tried to connect himself with the old family. But then the hole was empty ; my find was only a small part of its value if I did not get the stolen money also.

I carefully placed the records in the pocket of my shooting-coat, and stood still for a few minutes to think. These records had been placed there by the old minister of the ruined kirk, long before the days of the elder Sir John and the hiding of the stolen money. It was plainly absurd, therefore,

to look for the money underneath the records; moreover, the hole was empty. I replaced the spike, closing the hole that had contained them, and examined afresh. Under the stone by the wall, which had canted up when I trod on it, there was a hollow depression full of dust and grime. Into this I plunged my hand, and, after scraping up several handfuls of débris and filth of all sorts, I came on a bundle; this I drew carefully out. It actually was a pocket-book crammed to bursting with something; trembling with anxiety, I went to the narrow lancet window to examine my prize. Yes, here they unquestionably were—rolls and rolls of bank-notes. Hurriedly glancing at the sums noted on the bundles, I judged that the full amount of the fifty thousand pounds was there, just as the elder Sir John had handed it to poor Duncan Cameron, receiving it back from him on a promise to invest it, and hiding it here till both the old men were lying in their graves, and all memory of this large sum had been lost.

Hurriedly I placed this pocket-book also in the breast-pocket of my coat, and now the important thing was to get out of the mouldering old ruin as quickly as possible. With the daylight William Bradley and his nefarious helpers would return, and if they should find me, small indeed would be my chance of seeing the fair outer world again, or of my precious documents and pocket-book ever coming to their true owner. I would get out somehow, and get away down to the doctor's; his night-bell would bring some one, and there, at least, I should be safe,

even if the paralysis of the baleful drug should return.

I felt for the moment strong and well, not a trace of the weary giddiness which had preluded my former attack, so I thought I was safe, and I set out to thread my way through the old castle as well as I could remember the geography of it. My best chance, I deemed, was to make my way to one of the windows at the back, and to scramble or climb as best I might down the ivy. This was the way that Faa Simpson had got out, and the way that the boy Donald had got in.

I was now, as I guessed, above the range of rooms on the first floor, therefore I must descend the winding stair to the next landing, turn into the house from there, and go along the corridor, out of which the principal rooms opened, in one of which I should be sure to find a window from which I could descend. I would not waste matches which might be urgently needed, so I felt my way down the stair, hearing at intervals, with a certain cold shudder, the unmistakable sounds of my enemies, the rats. On the next landing was a turn which must lead to the corridor. I turned in through the doorless aperture, still feeling my way in the dim twilight of the faint dawn that filtered through window-holes here and there, rather rendering darkness visible.

After a step or two I stumbled and almost fell, bruising my shin, and bringing my right hand against a thick beam, that fell with a crash, sending a shower of blinding dust into my eyes, and a smell of damp

and rotting wood, plaster, dust, vermin, and all manner of abomination into my nostrils.

Where was I? Surely not in the corridor. I struck a match, and by its flickering light realized that I had missed the landing. I had come down where I should have gone up, and I was now in that dangerous part of the ruins which Sir John had shown me, but into which we had not gone, and where, through the tangle of rafters, I had seen the form of Morag perched on a corbel.

Scuttering of rats in every direction, but, thank goodness, I was awake and able to defend myself now; they would never come near me.

Not far away was an arch opening on to a handsome stairway evidently leading to the corridor. Up this clearly lay the way—a short climb, or perhaps a drop, and then freedom; but along this intervening space I must tread with abundant caution; any rash movement might bring the whole crazy ruin of timbers and partition walls down on my head.

Slowly and with infinite caution I made my way along, feeling rather than seeing, lighting an occasional match, careful not to touch a single beam or even a wall, lest the rotten structure should fall and bring unknown quantities of other things down on my head. Never again, I trust, may I pass through a similar experience, from which I trust Providence may deliver all ordinary and sane men. I had to reach the staircase somehow; a single false step might have brought heavy beams and tons of plaster and masonry on me. If I were once down,

the rats would be upon me, and would leave nothing but bare bones in a very short time; add to this that if I delayed I knew that William Bradley would be ransacking the castle in search of the treasure he rightly suspected to be hidden there, and with fifty thousand pounds at stake he was little likely to leave any accessible corner unexamined. Should he find me, it was certain death, and not only death —for that I could have faced with a certain amount of equanimity—but it was the loss for those I loved—nay, let me be honest, for *her* I loved—of all for which I had struggled, and which I had so nearly attained. My whole enterprise and all my exertions failed unless I could survive the next few hours, and get out of this death-trap of a ruin.

Cautiously, almost on tiptoe, I made my way to the foot of the stairs; the rats were close about, but they dared not attack a living and moving man. I had gained the stair; now all looked safe and easy. I mounted without opposition or difficulty; the light was dim, but I could see my way. In high delight I ran almost light-hearted as a boy up the lower flight of stairs. I reached the landing; turning the corner, I trod on something that squirmed under my foot. In the darkness I saw a moving mass in the corner against the wall in front of me. Great heavens! Rats! It was a rat I had trodden on; another bit my foot sharply. I felt something crawling up the leg of my trousers; I stooped to throw it off; it was another rat. I had cornered a troop of the brutes against the stone wall.

As I stooped, one made a spring at my throat. It fell short and bit my shoulder. I seized it and threw it off, as another caught my hand, biting me severely. I managed to get my hand on my match-box, and struck a light; for a moment the foul herd were scared by the gleam, and retreated. I caught up a heavy stick, and struck wildly into the mass of them; several squeaks told me that my blows had gone home.

At this moment I heard voices; there was no mistaking the suave, gentle tones of William Bradley.

'This way, men; we must search this corridor from end to end. It's all right; we shall have plenty of time; no one knows that Jack is dead, and no one will know till to-morrow, at any rate. A hundred pounds to the first man who finds a secret hiding-place, and ten pounds apiece to all of you directly it is found, whether the finder or not. If anyone comes in, or if you see anyone except our own men, kill him, and chuck him under a beam; no one can say a word about that.'

I was fighting for my life, but if I got safe away from the rats I could not fail to be killed by William and his ruffians; and if they did not come up, I seemed to myself to have no chance whatever against the rats. I made one frantic effort and a rush; several rats were hanging on to me, but I plunged right through the mass of them, guarding my throat as best I could, knowing that they would spring for that, and have me down if they could. By some miracle, I got safe through, and gained the

second flight of stairs ; up this I rushed, striking out right and left with my club, and, almost exhausted, I reached the top.

Dimness was coming over me ; I felt consciousness going.

Suddenly I heard a well-known, soft, gentle voice :

'Here ! follow me ! He is in the Royal Chamber.'

As I heard these words it seemed to me that I saw momentarily the form of Morag, and as consciousness faded I seemed to reel against a door which yielded to my weight, and I fell and lay on the floor of a room, and knew no more. Ages upon ages of wild and confused dreams succeeded.

At last I awoke in a comfortable bed, propped up with pillows. I turned, surprised to find that I could turn, and wondering where the rats had gone, what room I had tumbled into, and whether I should, after all, be able to get out before William and his crew should find me.

Slowly, very slowly, perception asserted itself. I was in a bright modern room in a comfortable bed ; the afternoon sunshine streamed in ; by the window sat a familiar form. Was this a dream too ? I murmured softly, 'Morag.'

Quickly she turned, rose, and came towards the bed, her arms forward in the pathetic gesture of the blind.

'Did you call ?'

'Morag, darling ! is it possible ? Is this you in real flesh and blood ? How in the world came I here ?'

She came up to me; her dear glorious eyes were wide open, but, alas! sightless.

'Yes, it is I,' she said. 'Are you really awake and well at last? What a time of anxiety we have had since we found you almost dead with those dreadful rats in the Royal Chamber in the old castle!'

'And the papers?'

'Safe, all of them. You have given us back our inheritance and our money.'

'But do tell me—how has it all come about?'

'Sir John died, you know. Faa Simpson turned King's evidence, and got a free pardon; he told everything. My dearest Esther, his sister, is with me now. But really you mustn't talk any more.'

'Just one word—what of William Bradley?'

'Bolted! He was taken by the police the day we found you, but some of his friends contrived to rescue him, and they say he got away to the Congo and joined some of the Belgians there.'

'Rascal! then he's going among those like unto himself. But is the property really and truly yours at last?'

'Really and truly, and the lawyers say now that it will take pretty nearly the whole of the Bradley fortunes to pay us back what they took unlawfully during the years they were in possession. They have to refund all the rents and interest. And all this we owe to you. What in the world can we ever do to prove our gratitude?'

'A greater gift than all that I have given you, even if the whole of what you say were really due to me.'

'That is impossible.'

'No, it isn't. I have the assurance to want the best and the greatest and dearest gift on earth, no other than Morag.'

'Dear! would you really saddle yourself with a poor blind girl, who can give you nothing but the fondest love that ever could be given to a human being?'

'Just that, and no other do I want. It shall be my privilege to be eyes for you, Morag. My charge shall be to make your life bright and happy if you will only trust it to me.'

'Only too gladly. And now, since you are so chivalrously willing to take me with all my troubles, and to cumber yourself with a blind and rather helpless invalid, let me whisper a secret in your ear. Our dear Dr. MacCulloch thinks that I am not permanently blind; he has examined my eyes, and he says that the whole of my trouble and weakness comes from the same thing, and he believes it is absolutely curable. He has given me an introduction to his old fellow-student, Professor Von Essen of Dusseldorf, who, he says, has treated similar cases with perfect success.'

'We will go there on our wedding tour, Morag, and come back when the cure is complete.'

I can but close this narrative with an extract from my own diary of July 14 last:

'On this day the eldest son and heir of the house of Kingsburgh-Cameron of Ard na Righ attained his first year, and on his birthday his parents celebrated

the occasion by swimming to the Seal Rock, carrying a bottle of champagne to toast the health of the young heir.'

I hope that any of my readers who may be passing by Ard na Righ will look in to see how the town of the King at length stands upon the King's point, and the Camerons have got back their lands. We will give him a royal welcome in the now entirely renovated castle. He will find Morag the Seal the gracious hostess, no longer the invalid, no longer blind ; but if he expects to find a case of second sight and wonderful dreams, he must go elsewhere, for these powers left her entirely with her blindness and delicacy.

THE END

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